

Band 2:

The Coming of Age

A romance novel and – at the same time - a pedagogical and cultural critical exercise on the genre of romance by **Cara Benedetto**.

Cara Benedetto gave the students and professors, involved in this project, a damned object, entlusting us in its damning process. *There is no book though it is coming*, she said, and her seminar called *Writing Anxiety A Way* started – here, from the announcement:

Anticipation, as a mode of anxiety or excitement around waiting, points to an event where the anxiety is not only inherent in the building of the event but also the end result. How we deal with an end inevitably leads to how we deal with new beginnings, as well as the present.

Months later she sent us *The Coming of Age*.

Thank You Cara for this manuscript that *dismantles ,coming’ as a construction of false desire in both the erotic and the consumer zones*. We shall excercise against anticipation as the contemporary imposition of performing everytime and everywhere and the climate it creates for one’s own expectations. That is the battlefield described, the act of writing is the proposal within that fight.

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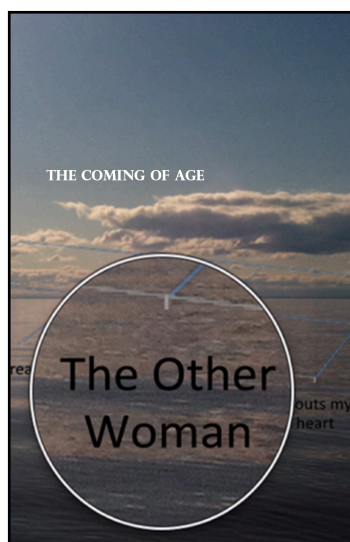
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THE COMING OF AGE

The Other
Woman

rea
outs my
heart

THE COMING OF *A*GE

THE COMING OF *A*GE

CARA BENEDETTO

DEDICATION

These pages belong to my mother, Marsha Siik and the dreams that she lived and built in me. This bound body is for Ziggy who I hold in my empty arms. This book is in the memory of a lost friend, a wife, a woman I didn't kiss, and the woman I will kiss. And this time is meant to feel As all is felt in and towards, Dana.

The spaces blank are dedicated to The Other Woman,
who breathes the illusion of shared reality, it is her pain
and gift that allows culture to name.

**NO CUM DODGING
ALLOWED...**

CUM DODGER

quickmeme.com

For respect to the dead some names have been changed
to the living. For respect to Age all events are true to her.

Age came with an awareness that it wasn't coming.

In other words, she knew she could cum, the possibility was there, but she didn't.

I like it from behind.

So do I, he spat into the short hairs at the base of her neck. *Harder.* If he couldn't get violent, she would feel nothing. Not that violence was the only path to intensity, but he had bypassed her gentle nudge, and in that instant she realized he was sloppy and self-centered. He gave too much.

Drinking coffee, they laid in bed as the morning droned a cool hello. She wasn't sure when she should leave. She couldn't tell because she wouldn't say what he meant to her. A friend of a friend once called her an emotional liar. She moved a leg up his muscly thigh.

Hi there, forcing her eyes to locate his.

Hi.

She shifted, trying to change the subject. She had gained three pounds and wasn't happy about the way her body felt in someone else's hands. She needed an exit strategy.

My mom needs a ride to work. I have her car.

The medium size and color of green held her mother's Subaru to the curb of baby boomer technology. She was grateful for its inner seat warmers that heated up her bruised flanks. She needed coffee to fill her in.

Cruising a drive through, the first window woke up a young woman. The girl took orders without smiling. At the pick-up an older gentleman glared at her under deep smile tissue and thrust his dick into her hand. Age drove to Mom's drinking his semen splatter.

Morning Cleo. The wide tabby was nearly twenty years old and didn't move much. Mom called her the Buddha Cat, likening the cat's immobility to deep meditation. Age refused to count animals by human rulers. Cleo sat on the beige footrest wearily gazing down and sometimes over. Her mom had already walked to work.

It was mid-to-late afternoon. She drank the last beer and sat down to begin writing another Paragraph Affair. That's what she called them. Her memory was too poor to develop characters, and the relationships they were based upon never lasted long enough to cross-reference in real life.

She gave up long-winded tracks, settling for paragraphs. It seemed there were enough people who enjoyed trolling her records of failed attempts at love to continue having them. Enough to six a pack.

Cleo! She called the cat's name out randomly so they both knew she was nearby. Once in a while, the cat would howl complaints to a closet door. Mom said she did this when she thought she was alone. Age figured the cat had just forgotten they were both still there. The two women also knew what it was like to shout demands at closed doors.

MOM

Age and Mom were two peas in a pod. They created one another, a Ferris wheel. Every year Age lived with her mother for a few weeks to make sure she could still live with other humans when necessary.

The routine looked like this:

Mom goes to work. Age drinks coffee.

Mom picks Age up after work to go to three used bookstores, purchasing one book at each.

Mom and Age go to Mom's favorite tequila bar and read the first sentence of each book.

Mom and Age fight about which sentence is most persuasive and why.

Mom and Age sit with Cleo and watch endless Home and Garden Network Television.

Age loved this window parody. It may have been their best beyond-war bet.

Age's mother grew up an only child in the suburbs of Chicago, with her adopted parents Edith and Eero.

Sixty-five years ago Eero shook hands with his second cousin, a Swede named Anderson. That was the deal, handshake for a beautiful baby girl.

When Age turned fifteen her mom yelled, *Where did you get those boobs?*

I have no idea, leave me alone.

A picture of Emilia, Mom's biological mother, showed

them. It was taken on her wedding day a few years after her first pregnancy. She had Age's eyebrows too.

You should stop dying your eyebrows, Mom pointed.

I'm an alcoholic, isn't that enough.

After Age lost her own shitty virginity she removed the imaginary hymen and threw it into a bag of Cheetos for later. She dropped off the guy, who was saying things like, *I hope you understand*, and wheeled to a boat launch on the Wisconsin River. She reclined her seat and gazed up at the carpeted ceiling of her yellow Pontiac Sunbird.

She closed her eyes and dreamt about her mom's body-mom:

Time to get on the train, her father eyed her silently.

Fuck off, she screamed, just as silent. With a solemn shrug she boarded the train south. The south was where succulent steaks got ate.

NEXT the text read.

That was Ryan forcing her to move in chronological order. Linear thinking was hard for both Age and Ryan, but with his help and some mutual self-worth, they'd pull each other's braids till one or two heads popped off.

Why is it so difficult? She thought out loud via text.

She slipped her eyes sideways to a sheet of paper TO CONVEY A SPEAKERS CONFUSION was scrawled in caps. This made sense. She decided to send it in a mass text to everyone she'd ever slept with, not a junior-size-blizzard by any ice cream standards. Before hitting send she handed

herself some momentary tough love, *maybe this is one of the reasons*, echoed meanly in her pragmatic speaking mind. Sent.

Back to Ryan she wrote, *Who knew there were so many lesbians in Wisconsin?* To which there was no reply. Ryan had emotional discretion.

That three pounds started to rub her beltline. She irritated up, and poured more coffee. *Nowhere to go and so much to do.* A thick line of dust circling the lamp caught her.

Her mother had decided to stop cleaning and hadn't told anyone. *I wouldn't clean either, Age thought, bad enough she has all this stuff to deal with, all I have is generation X debt.* Age knew that debt couldn't accumulate dust, just more of itself.

She got a rag and thought of Edith's smooth rub tactic. There was so much soap in her carpets, all she had to do was rub. Someday Age would be the same, but she'd use rage instead of cleaner. Edith's rage was clear, the color of whale lard. It helped erase her into the hardened woman she slicked.

Age imagined Emilia to sound her grease differently, more freely, with large breasts and a thick brow.

As she cleaned, Age imagined two lists.

Edith

Picking at my sides

You have a good figure

Shut up Eero

I do the basement stairs every day for exercise.

Emilia

Wafting quiet discernment

I have a good figure

I can't hear you

My wrist gets a workout one way or another.

That's enough character building for one day.

Scene: Skip ahead a few weeks and imagine Mom's cabin in the woods of Silver Bay, Wisconsin, on the shore of Lake Superior. She's come to write a book.

Age enters. After a week in the cabin she decides to make some guidelines based on her current patterns.

1. No screens in bed*
2. Asleep by ten.
3. No over-texting.
4. One drink rule.
5. Moisturize.
6. Run.
7. Eat meals.
8. Don't go C.
9. Leave Team A be.
10. No Plan B's. None whatsoever.

*Ok to put phone by bed at night, (in case of rape) but no checking when you wake in terror (the normal kind).

Getting back to erotic was goal. Her friend Maggie, head of development at Big Apple Circus, told her she was goal-oriented, and she never forgot her. She'd have to deal in this language, if she was going to write a book against it.

She remembered what it felt like, when he was behind her. Should she call him and ask him to come up for the weekend? She wondered if she had the patience to teach him how to please her.

She had grown accustomed to pleasing herself in a way that was so easy she barely noticed she was doing it. As a girl, both her mom and grandma would yell at her for rubbing up on the couch while the family watched TV. She needed to do it. She loved to do it. Her organs spoke to her as *The Twilight Zone* pummeled their brains.

Maybe she should let him watch TV while she guided his hands to apply the weight of his barely there attention and let the turns and horrors of the zone battle her unwaged war on the no cum.

She wondered if it would be possible to meet someone in a place that was so slow you barely recognized they were there. This must be what scientists called the Event Horizon.

But she liked his lines and his attention, and the ex-girlfriend that was still in love with him gave him extra value too. She wondered how much of the lesbian in her hated women because she couldn't have them. She wondered how much of the woman in her decided to give value to men because their desirability was measured by women. She wondered how she could take anyone seriously. But maybe this wasn't true. Maybe it was all a front.

I remember the first time I really saw you.

CHAPTER ON

COMING

HIM

She met him at the fundraiser for volunteer firemen at the WPA-made Town Hall in Silver Bay. The money would go towards uniforms, hoses, and a new fridge. She liked the sound of it.

Age eyed him pole-side. She thought he looked around twenty-nine but she'd been wrong before. She generally assessed age by how the people wore their top half. If the top went tousled, untucked, they were either below thirty or above sixty-five. If the upper region was neatly adjusted, they were in the middle of life, feeling the worth capital pumped into them daily. They worked.

This twenty-something could've been thirty-something, but his shirt was wrinkled and had a spot on the upper-left chest. She wondered what he was slurping when that speck marked his appetite, without remorse, she suspected. She drew up.

He didn't see her, everyone did. She was the new girl in town, the one that everyone wouldn't greet directly. She didn't have a problem with that, preferring to lay low. Her mom said she wasn't allowed to get involved with locals.

She agreed more or less. The men were scared. The women gave looks. She went as unnoticeable as a wolf on ice waiting for its mate.

I'd like a brat bun with pickles and cheese. Age didn't eat meat. She enjoyed sides. She grew up in a house with ninety-nine condiments and not much to put them on. Finding a dark spot on the community bliss bench, she throttled the sand-

wich with a forked tongue, finding the distance
she needed to attain his gaze.

She didn't look away, chewed with an open mouth, pink
lips denting yellow puff.

What's that, no meat?

The benched neighbor was blind but could smell iron
deficiency.

No, no meat, I like cheese.

How do ya keep alive? Aren't chya hungry?

I eat a lot of nuts, she replied, desponding to various sorts,
the few characters that she knew, in short wispy phrases.

She knew that the secret to seduction lived in exhale.
She pushed out her diaphragm and kept her chin down
to the ground, waiting. She could feel his form lurking.

His eyes neared a toe, swirling the dust at her feet,
blowing up the ankle space between skin and too-tight blue
jeans. Up around a hip, she felt him turn to adjust the shape
of her neck to his angled sunglasses. She heard him breathe,
a moist suck, his barrel chest lapped at a ball in his throat,
stuck.

Age leaned her breasts in, waist forward. Moving a right
hand, fingers unbent, to the edge of her sock, holding the
pose one two three, and then hand back up to her neck, to
softly touch the back of her shoulder. As she organized her
desire and played him out, she let her eyes fall to the inland
sea, the largest great lake. Looks off longing worked as well
as any job.

Her prey noticed an excessive tone but chose not to ap-
proach. Instead, he turned his back and moved farther into
the huffing men.

Pressing her right hand into her upper back, nails clutching blade, she uncrossed a leg and shifted out of the parking lot. Her pocket buzzed just in time. *I miss you baby. Come back, we all miss you.* Another eye roll out to sea, she felt a push from 300 miles away to say no.

The beach was empty save the snowy driftwood peeking through a fifty-degree day. She wandered in the loose direction of a frozen log. *I wouldn't sit there.* She didn't turn, kept walking, pretended not to hear. She knew the voice. *It's probably still wet and I'd hate to see you freeze that.* Age kept direct. Her face showed a slight turn of the lip, but she wouldn't make it easy for him. Why should she?

Hey! A close collision. She felt a hand caress the air around her waist as he tromped by in crunchy leftovers. He was hard to see against the fading light, but she made some effort to meet his demand. She stared into his half opened mouth, a pretty jaw.

I'm Him. What's your name?

She turned around again, bored by this one already, her pocket buzzed twice.

I can't, she claimed space.

Can't tell me your name?

Not with my pocket buzzing.

He placed a hand on her abdomen searching for the vibration.

My name is alex. Alex, like Fatal Attraction alex, my mom named me after her.

Um I haven't seen that one.

Great.

She moved away from his hand. His face was yellow, red,

purple, the light squeezed his head. She knew that her face was lit. Every pore and awful gash, zit, and discoloration, would stand. She faced him and the sun, pocket buzzing,

Ugh, I gotta go.

Ok, see you around?

Yeah I'll be around.

Bye alex.

She didn't know why she lied about her name.

She got bored with Age. She'd tell Him later. What was that anyways, *Him*? A joke? She liked it though, whatever it was.

She liked the whole scene, minus the buzz. Fucking bugs.

That was one good reason to come to nowhere in winter, beating the flies. She then realized that her cell phone was a tick. *Why hadn't she already figured that out?* Sometimes she felt as dumb as Him can come.

The Muse

He looked down at his calised hands. Fishing produced a thick crust of tissue that prevented him from feeling too much. This was also called saying sorry. The terms *sorry* and *thank you* conflated in his mind. He used them often, they were his go-to for any event, large or small, with or without pain. He liked to tell his crew that pain was just another feeling like any other thing to feel.

It was a good thing his hands were so thick, and fingertips raw and wide. He laughed to himself thinking of Age telling him he needed a manicure. He realized that he sometimes spoke to her in the third person.

Once he confided, *I said to myself, 'you know this story. I'm gonna fall in love with her and then she's gonna leave.' But you know what? Idoloveyou.*

Age smiled without looking him in the eye. He couldn't blame her, only wanted more of her. He wanted all her time and love. He got on Facebook for the fiftieth time, to research her notes and quotes.

They met on a couch twenty years ago. She was fifteen, he was of age, her best friend's brother. She was into drawing figures from books and took to drawing people's feet. Without any real fetish she hungered for life. Crushed, she asked Kellogg if he'd model for her. He agreed and laughed later, recalling how brave it was considering the size of his flaccid penis.

There they were, living stills. Kellogg on the blue couch, hand in hair and thigh. Age sat on the floor, shaking pencil in hand. Fifteen minutes in, Mom came home.

Afterwards they sat on her bed, avoiding the spot where the cat hadn't died, studying the penciled image, the pad, and the soft still life. He said it was nice. She knew it was crap but let him say it anyways. From there he drove her blue balls hatched.

I've loved you for twenty years, she replied.

HIM

Him's name was Finn. Age misheard Him. Him hung around the bay in the spring and summer months waiting for women like Age to unwrap and get brave. Him knew she was near, sensed her wet, hand over belly.

Him didn't have a job, hated to do anything much, preferring to sleep. He watched the water and read the paper in a loose kind of way. He read like he ate like he fucked.

He skimmed letters looking for sounds to click out with his tongue. Sometimes the letters made words that filled his box and uttered about pain, marriage, or death.

He tried to meet folds with hands, arrange them as they were already laid. When women asked, *What do you want?* He'd replied, *I don't search, I try to acknowledge.*

Him didn't listen. He heard a lot of fuzz.

Shit, Age reported. She woke up late, the day after Easter. She hurriedly piled her clothes next to the shower and brushed bone, dreaming of Allie's eggs. The ghost coach cornered her in the mirror. Toner, lotion, jeans, socks, bra, no bra, collar, sweater. There. All in blue, Age took to town.

Dingman Road flew by, then Curt's Yurt. Next: a blue-roofed home with views to sea, the beach resort motel, snowy shore to the right, some camps, their garbage, a swing-set, and finally the main drag.

The main drag had a gas station, community church,

gift shop, post office, telephone co-op, and two bars that opened when the other was closed. She rounded the corner and sailed into a James Taylor cover. When Ryan found out she had her mom's car, he said, *I can't believe your existence.*

Morning, am I too late?

Nope sidddown. Shoving herself into a brightly lit booth she examined her company and what was framed in the nearest window. A few elderly couples spotted the floor, a family of four breathed heavily in the center, and Him was grouped with some hunters in camo in the corner. She dropped her eyes and focused on the fork and family.

Coffee please.

Help yerself, it's over there.

Shit. Here, if somebody ordered coffee, they helped themselves, and refilled every cup in the room. Age usually loved this etiquette but became uniquely annoyed because she'd have to fill Him's cup. She stayed where she was and pondered a caffeine-free morning.

Slowly she made her way to the coffee stand. Pulling the hulky thing out she started with the family, *Anyone care for more?* Mom raised her cup.

After the old folks got some brown, she made her way to the corner, her eyes on the table in search of cups. She was desperate to get out of there, but knew there was no way. She let the ritual pass over her.

Hi.

Hi there.

More coffee?

Yes ma'am, all around.

Him placed a hand on the table inches from her left upper

thigh. She leaned over his shoulder to fill the cups. Without looking up, he said, *Thank you alex, Everyone this is alex.*

Shit, she thought, *later*, she remembered. *Hey.*

Tony, Tim, Wayne, meet Silver Bay's latest newcomer.

She managed some words summing up where she was from, being and going, and then walked very slowly to her table, pushing the last of the coffee top-down into her cup. She looked out the window and hoped for the end of shame.

Age ate in peace and let her mind spin over how she'd like to lay on that corner table and let them all nibble on a limb. All except Him. Him had to watch and wait. Him was for private, whatever that was.

She was shifting a crossed thigh, when Him knocked on a window and gave a short wave.

May I have my bill please?

The waitress dropped it, with a note on the backside, a phone number. *Shit.*

Age glanced at the numbers, a lottery undone. Her whole of attention then rested on the oversized napkin dispenser decorated with sun-bleached pinecones. *Sauces Available Upon Request*, beneath, *Combo basket with fries \$7.50*, and under that, *Mac and cheese bites 8 for \$3.50*. She'd nearly had enough when the next sign that showed itself swallowed Him's chances: *Watch the races here!*

Buckle up, the radio reminded her. National Public Radio was a bad headache you'd never beat. The voices were too clear, laced with downturns where there should have been question marks. Age could not listen to voice after voice negotiating their persuasive tendencies with flattened tones and beleaguered punctuation. She found her way back from breakfast in a noisy fog.

Her college boyfriend was a radio. A voice for the pocket. It began with a broken van and, four years later, ended with half-a-home. It ended again, when she fucked his friend.

Age bored her way through the voices streaming around the car and pulled into the driveway. It was hard to walk, her swollen feet pushed at the tips of her thinning black leather shoes. Tapioca boiling in a bathtub got everyone sweating.

The wood was wet. The lake frozen. Almost May and her feet were suffering from a condition produced by cold weather. The redheaded doctor got online and diagnosed her with images. *It's rare, called Chilblains.*

Age had been living on chili all week. When she wasn't stunk she scratched at sores on her toe-tips. Ironical, maybe, that the origins for each affect lived in the same sound. She preferred to think of irony the way she thought of marriage, punishment by boredom.

How could that be I need more jobs one after another
recorded it's length cutting trees shoveling snow cleaning up
arranging furniture making tea walking the triangle sunset
drive wine at dusk another fire.

LIKE.

*E*very now and then she'd feel herself begin to break.

Age would break. She'd make a movement that couldn't add. She knew she needed to do it. Make trouble. Without psychic itches, she made them physical. She was rolling downhill. Week two wasn't moving. She tried to lift a finger in her schedule, but it was tight. Planned and set. Meetings. Sex. Interviews. Art fair. Therapy. She had no exit strategy, and that was the only freedom she knew. She needed an accident.

That night she slept a lucid dream. She watched herself run from room to room to room. She couldn't keep him. Couldn't quit counting. His flaws. There were flaws in the woodwork. Flaws in the snowflake. Manic, she peeled the orange, drinking as a drink never wanted to end, Age drank cold. She needed to slow herself down. She needed to thing herself into a past. She wanted to be a rock on the shore, one that was flat and thin and easy to skip.

The next morning she gave up on art. *Give me a break.* She gave up on men, punctuation, and now this. Well everyone needs to start their day somewhere. Age began with a materials crisis. She looked at a can, picked it up and blew *Cleo* into its oval opening.

She put the can down and ate another orange. *Coffee time, no. Time to read, maybe.* She picked up her phone, searching for texts she may have missed in her sleep. One read, *Let's*

talk tomorrow, when I'm on my diet. She put it down feeling like the whole world wanted to get smaller. She wanted to get bigger. She had to, if she was going to buy the plot across the street.

She decided on another orange and screenshots. Age had gotten into the practice of taking screenshots (she called it photography) of pro ana and thinspiration websites.

She was in tune with her body and enjoyed seeing other women move through the motions of imaging pain. She even made a deck of cards out of the more corporate looking images. She loved them. They were bank ads for the support of women hating themselves and each other. They were bank ads.

Once her banking was complete, her thoughts returned to work. She had lied to three lovers online that day. The first lie was small but would go a long way. The second was insignificant, a holding tank. The third was, indirectly, a lie to her self. She figured that, instead of reading three books, she'd work out three lover lies.

She'd materialize the relationship she always wanted, the book she'd never read, and a perfect man from three. Her toe blister had broken open. Her feet wept in pink and purple flesh.

There was a knock at her door. Age lived in fear of people dropping in. It was Him.

Hi Him.

Hi.

What did you call me?

Him.

Who's Him?

You.

I'm Finn.

Whatever.

Can I interest you in a smelt fry?

No I'm very busy lying and weeping.

Really?

Yes, actually. You can't see my foot right now, but it's disgusting, so I have to stay put and let it ooze or I'll puss all over your car, and then what?

I don't think anyone would notice some slime at a smelt fry.

What's a smelt?

It's a fish. They're small and you fry them whole.

Gross. I don't eat things. I eat extras.

Ok...well, you should come.

Why?

Because I want to introduce you to someone and she's on her way out.

You think you'll get me to leave the house by telling me there's a stranger out there? You're seriously mistaken.

Him reached down, catching her off guard. Popping one knee forward he pulled a slipper off. She fell forward leaning into his back and feigned annoyance as she tumbled over him.

There, she said, no one is going now.

Within moments he gently rolled her up and off of him, letting his hands graze her hips in a gesture of stability and care.

Fine.

Him pointed to a small woman in a blue baseball jacket. They approached her. Him placed a hand on the woman's lower back and leaned in gently.

Rita I want you to meet someone, this is alex.

Age needed to fix this.

Alex is my middle name, pleased to meet you, I'm Age.

Rita peered from under a forehead of wrinkles and sag.

Hi Age, I sold your mother that land.

Rita Rintala! It's such a pleasure to finally meet you, my mother is so in love with her land. He, pointing at Him, told me you were leaving soon, I thought you lived in the house next door...

Not anymore, I had to sell it to move into an apartment in Duluth. My kids want me closer and with Harold gone...

I'm so sorry, I had no idea.

Rita had seven children and seven sisters. All were born in the same house. Age didn't want to think about Rita too much. She wanted to keep the woman's voice in her mind like a sprouting turnip, wishing it to return when she needed it most.

Age went home and wrote twelve single-spaced pages. She didn't feel good about it. She knew that she'd have to burn them up as soon as Him occurred to her again. She moved on from there, considering a few more lies and a lot less lines.

The voices wouldn't stop.

There he was again, spilling a bottle of orange juice into

his mouth. She slowly put the image in a folder and dragged it carefully to the trash bin on her desktop. She refocused on a blank screen. *I looked for you in the walk-in cooler today*, he texted. She erased it. *I only want what you can offer*. The email spread itself thin in her box. She deleted it over and over. *I'll do it if you'll be my sex therapist. Hello Ms. Age. FACE!!! I miss your face, when will it be in front of me again?*

Her mother told her that she kept the phone by her bed in case she called in a state. Age asked her, *What kind of state?* To which she responded, *The one you called me in from New York for the last fifteen years and before that too.*

Oh, she responded, *that state.*

She got into trouble, so she had something to call her mom about.

She wondered how she'd clean all these voices out of her pit. The ash can wasn't big enough. She felt like placing her head in the oven and calling the cops.

Finally page 13 over,

CHAPTER TWO

HOOD BLOODED

Like a hungry deer she wandered abundant and starving,
various in her love.

She kept up the pace or she'd lose evening peace. Age had unseen pressure, night terrors. They circled her for eleven hours one night, not letting her wake. They were filled with rioting, a circus act.

These mornings she would have tea, avoid Him, and continue out the door. Her napkin dispenser held dead trees, that was all. There was no more potential screaming through the windowpane. She held onto her hairs, cutting them daily.

She once made a man who would go into the bathroom under unknown pretenses and face the mirror while cutting every hair on the back of his head with very tiny scissors. He did this to keep demons from lurking behind his head labia. He couldn't see behind his ears, didn't trust them, and suspected conspiracy.

His name was Marc and he lived in Paris. He hit on her in the toilet when her brother wasn't looking. She didn't know how to use her phone, so instead of his name, she entered NONMOM.

He claimed to be a young Foucault. He was jealous, vain, abusive, and very bad in bed. He had a velvet-lined apartment that demanded close dancing and fire-eyed blowjobs on a sagging mattress.

Age spent one summer with him, absorbing him at his mother's home in the south of France. In the morning he'd sit at a table forty feet away and write, howling ferociously to himself for hours.

She enjoyed spending time with his mother, who also happened to hate him and who had owned a nightclub in Paris where Nina Simone had played. After his writing act, they'd

go to the beach where she dismissed his attempts at love and he'd yell How To Drive.

There were two starving horses on his mother's farm. Age loved them because in trying to please him, she also starved herself.

It ended in melodrama at Hotel Renoir. She checked into a different room, fleeing at dawn. The concierge knew there was something awful happening and was discreetly sweet. She hurried away, paid all the bills, his bills, and several hours later, settled at her brothers' flat in Paris.

The next day she was in a terrible bike accident. Falling face first she left the scene a hair-lip. *Bad breaks*, she had told her brother. That same evening she had arranged to meet Marc, but her brother refused to let her out the door, barricading it with three bikes and his body. Out of disbelief and anger she seduced his friend while he slept.

She never saw Marc again, until he friended her under a psudenym on Facebook.

The Vent

Unlike Paris, Age moved quickly. She had remarkable speed with suck thick bones. She ate more oranges and told more lies. Her toes wept, keeping the palms of her feet moist. Her nails cracked under stress. She grew heavy.

She was fine with day-to-day changings until one morning she recognized a small voice airing itself from The Vent. She'd seen similar voices in solitary confinement remakes. She decided to stay as far away from heat as possible.

Your feet need me. I am not him. I have no I. Come, let's do an interview.

Fine. Age agreed.

When the heat piped up again, Age was frigid and took warmly to its whisper. Anything to get away from him.

HIM

Him didn't get women. Every morning he'd sit on the bench and patiently wait for Age to show up outside Allie's coffee. She never came.

Morning, a woman in bright shorts sauntered by. *I could drive those hips home*, he thought.

Nice day, he replied. His look didn't reach her eyes. Hip-level was all she got.

A few minutes later, *Hi there*, younger this time, but he knew it already, had had it once before, didn't like its sound after three drinks and a few games on the poker machine.

Hey, eyes unmoving.

Where was she? he thought. *How could someone spend so much time avoiding him?* Him didn't get it and what was with her name. He wanted her that was for sure.

He wanted to pull her hair, yank it hard from behind, pushing her bottom lip out. He wanted to bite her lower slug mouth and eat her throat out with a moist fist snuggled into the crotch of her warm blue jeans. She had tight thighs and an ass with some extra. He wanted to hold her bottom half in front of his face while she snuggled up against his cotton sheets, moaning Him.

Him had plans. His favorite scenario acted itself out in her mother's cabin. It was freshly built, a new stage. Him hadn't helped with the building, but he'd cut down the trees for lumber and hauled them out through the forest with horses. It had been a hard day, the snow was record deep and one horse was having some hoof-rot. He recalled leaning into

the beast gently rubbing its leg as it cried out in pain with each new step.

Him wanted to share sweat with Age. He wanted to work her over with the softest parts of him. He'd place a forearm on her stomach; a seatbelt to protect her from the furnace of pleasure that would erupt from her lower pelvis. He wanted her to hold onto his arm while he spent time in her, gathering her sap, carting her sounds, and rolling her out with some fresh wooded potential. Him was confident that he could please Age and found plenty of insider anecdotes that gave him a developed sense of self.

In truth Age could take Him's heat or leave it. She had lived long enough without Him's furnace fingers and didn't think twice about how he could squeal her out or cut her stumps. Age was busy with her new friend, who also happened to be a furnace of sorts.

The Vent

Have you ever been with a man who was made of voice and heat?
Yes.

If yes, why?
It just turned out that way. I never met him.

Do you prefer ice melting or water freezing?
Water freezing.

Do your feet hurt when they're cold?
No, my feet do not hurt when they're cold. They hurt when they warm up.

Does your body feel better cold or hot?
My body feels better when it's alone and cold, than cold and with someone who isn't.

Do you want me to be near or far?
Far. For now.

The interview was fun. She liked that someone without a body took an interest in her. The online dating service was called *Heat Up The Bay* and had a picture of a giant fireplace on the homepage.

She swore off *OK Cupid* a year ago but recently began toying with some north woods dating sites just to see what people were up to. She was immediately turned on by the name and thought that this could produce some live itch in her brain.

She got her first message from The Vent the day before yesterday and hadn't been fireside since. She watched it burn her down question by question.

Age forgot about Him and the nameless others that filled her various inboxes with random concerns.

Age got so caught up in The Vent that she began to eat her meals in bed with pens covered in her wet, damp towels stewing the floor. She didn't go as far as the front porch. She remembered her mother's words and decided that as long as she stayed hidden, no one, not even The Vent, would spot her.

How many fingers are inside you now?

Two, no three.

Can you tell me what you feel?

I feel a hundred strong-armed spiders clawing at my clit, they're trying to eat it from the inside out, and it tickles and hurts.

Can I lick it?

Lick what?

Your web.

No. I don't want anyone licking my web.

What are you looking at now?

Now I'm watching you lift up my shirt, watching my breasts against your lips, watching my nipples swell and redden as you suck. Now I'm watching your hand undo my fly, and slip inside me, all four fingers gripping as you continue to suck. Now I begin to sway as you push harder from inside. Now you gently push me up and over your head. Now I

softly roll into a relaxed and needy position as you undo your buckle and throttle me from behind. Now my eyes are out the window looking at a single fenced-in wild flower.

This was going well until the phone rang and Age had to resurface.

Yes I'll be there, thanks for calling. It was the head of the department, they wanted to interview her in person. She looked at her toes. They were blue and purple, the itch was gone but the sores were still there and the skin was soft and rippled. She made a face.

Del, I'm coming. Can I stay with you for a night or two? I love you and will bring your home a cheesy curd party.

Yes, Del said, yes of course, she said yes.

And with that the entire social world began to pour down on her. Age forgot about The Vent and ugly foot wet. She was afraid they'd get the better of her before she made it out. The job, the them, the men, and regret.

She began to write furiously. Without answers she became desperate for ways to measure, this time she called them Parallel Affairs. They were too long and too short, manic in episodic delivery like a beginner storyteller who drank too much Garrison Keillor.

The dog-shaped temperature gage

The black lab pressed its paws against the window. It couldn't get in, would never get in like that, but continued to serve the humans with its belly- numbered staph infection. Outside the wind poured tiny flecks of discolored carrots, or that's how the dog imagined them to taste, like a vegetable smells to a measuring cup, familiar with carrot cake

but never held in its grip. “Hold me,” the lab spoke. “No,” the snow cold.

And another

A visit with the internet plus my period

“I didn’t want to scare you,” he husked out of a sailboat’s lung cavity. A shadow pressed the screen, softly touching a nose to several tiny holes. “Just here to put in some internet.”

I grumbled some odd-sounding letters and rubbed the sore next to my mouth.

“I’d like that,” I shouted. “Can I get you some coffee?” All I heard in response was hesitation, to indicate that they were in fact working for my mother.

“We’ll be tromping around.”

When his round face spaced itself from the door, I saw a moon, the murderous result of a dusty lunar eclipse.

“How many wires got crossed from this moon-faced hunk?” I later asked the net. “None,” the owl hooted over a chorus of Facebook users.

Age knew that she’d have to focus on her real life interview but Job always fell to the side of Sleep. Her feet began to itch. After a long walk next to a gray dusk, Age began to search the depths of distraction and decided to miss.

She wanted to speak with **B**. She missed him. His abstraction. His learning, his teaching, his masochism.

She wanted to be near him, feel his jaw, and touch his hand. She remembered their last conversation. It had been nearly one year and a few matches since.

So that is how you want to end it, she said coolly, mint on her tongue.

I...never...meant...I want to play tennis. This was his attempt at a reply. Backhanded, he pushed her out of his way.

You haven't told me if you accept my offer, he stated.

I am unclear as to what your offering B.

I want to play tennis.

You mean we finally begin to talk about our relationship after three years of sleeping together and you are now telling me that you want to play tennis?

Yes. He was finally sober and very proud of himself. He exhaled smoke. *Age, I am with you all the way. I have never met anyone like you.* It was the third time she had heard this particular disclaimer in two weeks.

Can you try something else? You're timing couldn't be worse.

Ok. You would be a bad partner. I can't imagine us together, because you are too intense. Your intensity touches me in a way that... he trailed off. Then picked up again, *it can only be a destructive relationship. I don't want that, even if it's the best sex of my life,* and then he added, *and this has nothing to do with my wife. Nothing at all. I will never ever be enough for you.*

You will never be satisfied.

That was the third time. The only thing B. was missing was the word “inspiring”, which German men used when speaking about things they didn't understand.

She was silent and realized that within five minutes she had gone from thinking he wanted to be with her to feeling like

she could not hold on to one more breath. She held hers for a moment. She knew that if she reacted the way she wanted that he would be right. And she did, she got angry, finally.

B. I've been your mistress for three years.

I'm so sorry Age, but I don't consider you my mistress just because we have sex. And I feel really bad about the last time. I was drunk. We shouldn't have.

I'm always drunk.

No you're not.

Yes I am, but it's okay, because I don't do things that I normally wouldn't do if I was sober when I'm drunk. I do what I want, drunk or sober.

Age, what do you want?

I have always wanted to be in a relationship with you.

We are in a relationship. Now we need to name it and if you don't want what I have to offer then...

She nearly fell asleep. The sun was rising in Berlin, and Age had had a busy night. Both a sixty-one-year-old woman and forty-year-old man had approached her at the bar around the corner. Before she made her escape, she watched them get into a fight over who would win. The woman was a singer who spoke broken English. The man had a pirate earring and offered her cocaine. She grabbed a bag of chips and headed for bed. That's when she broke her one-year rule, after two weeks, and called Plan B.

B. I have been so patient.

I know it must seem that way, he captioned.

This is insane.

Age, I'm so sorry.

B. please stop, you are not making me feel better. She repeated it

before she snapped her German flip phone shut and tossed it to the floor. Her face was hot rubber. She fell into dreams about him seducing her best friend. She had always known that she was just a young fuck, leaving him with an easy conscience to clean. She was his student. She was in love. She wanted to seize him and push him into place.

Her notions on love were naïve. There were no building blocks in her world, only a Godmother's wish. She had forgotten the steps between Cinderella's dirty legwork and her tiny shoe size. *Were there any steps other than magic and the good luck to be petite?* She kept dreaming. She loved him the minute she saw him at orientation. She would have done any number of things to make him want her. Turned out the direct approach didn't work with men who have it all. Turned out that she was as big an asshole as them.

She'd had a rough month. She couldn't believe that these men and women, so brilliant and complex in their thinking, could actually have the nerve to speak to her as if she wasn't even in the room. Was she that transparent? Had her neo-liberal strategy worked this well? Had she truly become the invisible nomad that she dreamed of being? Is there a decision to be made? Was this suppose to be a romance novel for the masses or the tour boat floating mid stream past the rave and broken factory? What time was it in his world and how many options did he really have?

She wouldn't talk to B. for days, maybe even weeks, maybe a month.

I thought I had finally made a best friend, he said.
Then, I truly did want to start dating then. And then, Please don't put me with the others.

Her heart broke with each new fragment. He detailed three years of lies in ten minutes of growing light. They both needed to go to sleep. There was no pleasure here. Only the dynamics of shared resistance. Romanticizing resistance. He deserved nothing from her each time he asked her what she wanted.

There was a moment. When he said, I am fully with you. I feel so intensely towards you. She felt like she had found something. Like when she didn't ask her mom again where that thing was. She'd found it on her own. For maybe two and a half seconds she felt as though there was something to find. And then it was gone as quickly as anything. They shared nothing.

She'd become a tyrant who believed in one investment principal. The other day she heard herself telling someone that she no longer referred to her romantic relationships as relationships, she now called them "projects". *Did they know this?* the girl asked. *Yes, I tell them they are characters with a shelf life.* She then explained that she was in fact hoping that if she did this, it would actually improve her relationships because they would be over-determined, a documentary in the works.

Everyone knows that there's just no such fucking thing.

Six months before or after

She had found herself at a desk on the fourth floor of a sordid apartment building in Brooklyn. Greenpoint to be exact. Greenpoint minus the Polish people to be specific.

The Polish people became slumlords and moved upwards to Ridgewood, Queens, where there were still mostly white people and plenty of stoops to lay on. Greenpoint had become a place where aging hipsters open lifestyle shops, which cultured their own butters from some cow living on a nearby rooftop, recently greened.

She looked at the rug that hung like a cat and pawed with an aching claw. The cat looked out the window in response to her steady silence. She wondered if the cat cared that she never listened to music. She wondered if the cat would remember Plan B.

The first time B. came to her, in a secret rush from his yelling life, Ziggy climbed atop the highest bookshelf and stared down at him. Ziggy was not a fan. It wasn't until B. had come on her several times that Ziggy felt like he could get into it too. He would sit across from her, next to him, and together they would look at her wondering. She knew then that neither one of them had understood a word she had ever said, but who else would listen?

She spoke into the bloody bowl of chili, batting his tail away from the bean pile. She tried to remember why she lived in Brooklyn. She took out a pen and piece of paper. As she wrote she managed to drum up: some friends, an apartment - furnished and without bedbugs, an art community as corrupt as they come, a few memories of jobs and men and women that she was somehow committed to but no longer knew, a street with a bar, the possibility of knowing no one every day. The list ended in no place and that was where it stayed.

She wondered if B. still thought about her. She wondered

if he was rebooting his marriage with a different ex-student. She couldn't think about his face, his hands, his chest on hers. She tried to join Zig in window searching.

She began to choose her own adventure. She ended the fantasy quickly because she knew as well as the rug at her side that she wouldn't, couldn't go through with it. She was not capable of just being like anyone else. She had to be no one or the only one. Her sweater scratched her into being. She started the press release.

The problem with Plan B is that it never ended. It began in a curse.

I want to fuck you forever. It was Miami Basel and they had spent hours banging away, she'd never done that before. She would never do that again. She had to let him go. His wife forbade their attempt at friendship. She couldn't blame her. *I'd* never let that go. Then again *I'd* probably hire a hit man. The wife was mean and thin like a nail. She tugged around and needed and bled like a half-dead squirrel. Age was her too. They were the same.

Lighting a fire, Age whispered the wife's name into the oven hoping that the woman would let her rage towards Age go. She didn't want it directed at her any longer. She needed release over and over. Early and daily. She begged the wife to let her go on living

The Muse

In the midst of avoidance, guilt and hell, Age received another tick-bite notification. Kellogg had sent her another selfie. She liked the way he looked but cringed at the self in suffix form. He looked into his phone as if it were an open wound.

He knew she couldn't take it, couldn't handle any of it. Just before Age left, Kellogg had taken in a baby bird in the process of losing its beak. The bird was born in minus-twelve-degree weather. One morning they found a mouth beside it's body. After that Age went.

When was the last time you tried to destroy yourself? She asked him. She wanted to know what kind of torture she could look forward to.

He sputtered, *I threw a hook into the back of my neck last winter.*

Not bad, she thought to herself. She could recall exactly four incidents in the recent month where she nearly expired due to her own risk.

She wondered if it was better to do so, more or less. Maybe that also depended on how much of a martyr one felt themselves to be. The bigger the martyr, the more self-destruction necessary to unleash life and feel good enough? Or was it the other way around, the more of a martyr the less need to unleash death on others? It was over her head. She let it.

The baby died this morning, he Facebooked.
I'm sorry. She wasn't.

In order to fight off cold and indecent exposure to convention, she googled Jane Campion's top ten favorite films. She got some dark pleasures.

That was where she'd leave off tonight. On a note that left a dangling hook, or noose rather, from floor to ceiling. No one would get off this night.

Her anticipations fell short.

CHAPTER THREE

REAL LOVE NO GENITAL

It was late morning and Age smelled char. Her mania was a smoky pillow. She'd survived the fire but it left marks. Against rule, she woke from a nightmare and checked her email bedded. Team A. had written, she felt a wave of personae. The sink dripped, a fly swung by.

Another gray and rainy day. *I'll be ready in one week.* But for now Age was desperate to write, to keep writing, to grow in a way she'd never done. She'd force herself to grow.

She'd stopped eating in order to get light, expand in lightness, to get closer to god. She knew how to do it. The cabin was her personal stage but it needed to be pure. More Windex was necessary and less recyclable objects.

She hated expectations around things that could be recycled. She hated the prospect of people throwing their waste into bins that would transform them into something without guilt. It was an obvious lie. She realized in her distracted rage that she was bending out of shape and suddenly, without warning, Age felt a deep fear of Germany.

Amid her random panic and inner rant she remembered a loose release from sleep:

We were trying to get to a concert. There was a young

woman ahead of me, an Olympic chess player who only ate apples. Two of me found an empty train car. Straddling him, I stood as they sat. I watched an industrial landscape move over his tongue as she placed the thin cord of cotton panties to one side. His hands creased inside me, pink and exposed. Her fist held me vertical, a dangling offence. I let my bladder go as she drank from my body. I could feel her harden as he gulped. When we all got off, I woke.

A Team

If she gave herself a week then what did a puddle matter?
She could not figure out what to do.

(Writing her out)

Dear Cleo,

I've decided to order three pizzas today. I'll name them after the cat, the bird, and the baby deer in the backyard. After that I'll watch *The Master* and maybe *The Servant*. In which direction do you think I'll look best? Please don't look away today it's too late and painful already.

Love, A.

Dear Cleo,

This kind of letter writing is close to the Lettrist school of thought. They were big on letters, each note looked more like a single wish directed towards a sound or person. I want to make nonsense between people. I don't think they need connective tissue, they need better practice handling snakes.

Love, A.

Dear Cleo,

Today you licked her salty fingers, trying to bite a nipple. It's all right I gave up on breast-feeding anyways.

Love, A.

HIM

Him was at a distinct disadvantage. He was well aware that pussy grew on trees and that fucking a woman covered in moss would only give him dick-rot. He needed to climb her rooted selection and get to the core of this unavailability. He needed an angle, a tool, to enter.

He didn't mind going to her house, but she would. He didn't think he'd win her over with being aggressive, not this one. He couldn't wait until the next Friday night fish fry. It was days away and he needed to see her sooner.

A pre-punching bag.

He didn't have her number, but he knew that she had internet installed and that meant that *Steve...hey, it's Finn, yeah hey, I'm good, how's it goin with you? Great, listen.*

Fuck yeah.

Let's just get this one out of the way, she thought. Him was good at getting her to say sure. She was writing her last love letter when her cell barfed another ringtone. Its plastic muscle exposed Him. She agreed to the boat ride. It meant some kind of sex. Even if she changed her mind mid-wave, they'd have nothing else to do.

Prepping entailed clipping the pubic hairs at a slight angle, the way she liked it, not short. She'd leave the armpits alone. Her face needed headless work.

Mid-thirties had left her tits flat, but they only appeared

to fall when she removed the bra. Not a good look. She'd leave them loose.

Bending in front of the mirror she pushed her ass out, tensing thighs she lifted herself onto her toes, and then lowered her cheeks slowly. Taking a semi-squat poise, she flexed her vaginal muscles. She did this ten times. She liked to squeeze around fingers and toes. It helped the blood flow when she was ready to feel. She'd heard there were balls for this kind of thing. She cringed at the idea of shoving knuddles inside. Where was the lion? Where were the seals? Did they use hoops and balls better?

Oh yeah, she had nearly forgotten to check that her IUD hadn't fallen out. On her knees, she reached up with her middle finger and just barely nudged a tiny plastic string poking from her cervix.

All set.

The Muse

Another page in, Age decided to play Fish. She sent Kellogg her most recent Paragraph Affair. It involved ass sucking, which she imagined he loved.

Beautiful, he responded, *Wonderful*.

It was meant to turn you on, she stated. *Will you read it to your crew?*

Do you want me to? She could hear him laughing.

What are their names?

She wrote.

Sal stood stiffly, tending to a large halibut in net. He barely noticed Veronica's tiny ass bump up against him. The boat was narrow and provided a good space for an intimate orgy of four, he quietly erected. But he was the captain, *how could that ever happen?*

Can you pass me the knife? Roger directed to Sal.

That's how, Kellogg whispered.

Without looking, Sal reached over with one hand, sliding the silver hook in Veronica's direction. Veronica picked up where it stopped, handling it like a bone, she gently set it next to Roger's left fist.

Kellogg thought he saw Roger's eyes undo Veronica's top button before taking the knife in one hand while gently rubbing the flopping fish with his other.

Veronica turned around, abruptly placing a thumb in Sal's mouth, she bit solidly into his neck with sharp white

teeth. Sal put the halibut on a ledge to die while he pulled Veronica's panties down and shuttled her ass with his tongue.

Kellogg made up for the difference in death and connection touching all three softly with his lips.

A finger in each, they were on their knees as Veronica spilled fish guts on their backs and howled with pleasure, gently rubbing her clit against the hot knife, both eyes on one side.

There is nothing to wait for. I will never live there, she repeated.

HIM

He was ten minutes early, which made her like him lightly. She downed another half.

The sailboat was perfectly blue and white. As he helped her aboard, she spun around to kiss him, killing both guards. Him didn't recognize this woman, fuchsia lips, full breasts swaying his direction. She was a woman who knew what she wanted.

Age wasn't surprised by Him in any way. She read his power plays so clearly it was like looking straight to the bottom of the lake mid-May.

She wandered over to the hull and brought out a bottle of white.

Glasses?

She refocused her eyes on the pink horizon. She'd been to every beach in Brazil, the islands of Greece, coasts of California, Florida, Alaska, Spain, Portugal, but there was no horizon set like Silver Bay.

He floated on deck, a pouty sailor. She hadn't seen the parts of his face clearly until now. They were articulate, nearly independent of one another. Like a Mr. Potato Head, one could imagine removing the parts to rearrange his Picasso. She liked the whole and it didn't change from profile to front. He was hot, she didn't need to look long to know. He approached her, intent on looking distracted, doing a poor job of it.

She didn't care to dialogue, unless they could Ping-Pong. She pulled on his sweater, signaling for him to come close.

She said nothing, looked directly into his eyes, and placed a hand on his stomach. Keeping steady eye contact, she slowly moved her hand across his chest, unsmiling. She turned him around by the waist, a firm palm ending on the small of his back. They faced the sky, an audience they had not yet met.

Here, she said, I like it here. He didn't move as she laid her weight into his lower back and massaged him while the sun descended beneath a low-lying cloud.

He asked her a few questions to which she did not respond. His skin was tense. He didn't trust her and was smart not to. She smiled in spite of herself.

When the sun was about to set, she nestled into him and sipped her wine. She liked the way he felt. She realized that it wasn't the body that bothered her: it was everything else. Bodiless voices pushed her buttons to places she'd never get back.

In one blink she swept her hair up and dangled a smooth neck to his mouth. He accepted the offer.

Him was having a hard time imagining his luck but he kept his cool and forgot his devices. Somehow he'd undone her wall. Now he'd need to do her down.

Age knew that if he were mean afterwards, she'd let the cards settle and find a new body. She knew that after tonight she'd have enough to get through a paragraph or two.

The Muse

Kellogg was having some hard luck. Age had fallen off social media, and a recent girlfriend had become relentless. Meanwhile his ex-wife had screwed his finances so badly he'd lose his boat. He needed a nightcap.

Whiskey neat please. There were a few people spotting the bar at the High Point Steakhouse. Lying low, he nuzzled a heavy glass.

A woman in her fifties sat a familiar two stools down. She avoided his look, holding a monologue with her gin and tonic.

Two seats from her was a couple in disagreement, on the verge of no-speak. Kellogg spent some time on the girl's hair, short and mouse brown, with a slight nose curving off a prominent widows-peak. He liked her.

She noticed and soaked. Kellogg liked boyish-looking girls, he wasn't sure what had driven him to marry the overweight blonde that smelled like lies and wet cheesecloth. His ex-wife had fought cancer with mermaid tattoos. She was tough and fun and always won.

Avoiding the sad-eyed girlfriend, he took out his phone to make sure he still had some lines cast. Yep, a few dutiful hanger-ons that would meet up for a drink upon text. He didn't know why he was holding out for Age.

He liked to long as any good muse does. He reread the story she sent him the day before. *Where was her line?* He sent her a photo of his hard-on bunching up corduroys, to which there was a dry, *you shouldn't sleep with your pants on*

response. What could he do to make her?

He went back to his lines: Katie, Megan, Sarah, Lucy, Sammy, the ex, and that was it. He knew that if he stuck around long enough, one of them would surface. Kellogg dug deep, took one last look at the couple and hit send.

I don't want a her.

The Vent

When she got home, her heat was off. She feared blood itch. Age stoked a quick fire in the stove and set out to find the cause. The heat had become jealous. She couldn't believe it, but there it was, totally unresponsive to her answers.

She couldn't warm it up, couldn't get it up, it wouldn't ignite, heat, or inspire inquisition. They were at an impasse. She had to take action before her feet ran off again.

Playing docile, Age stayed and waited. Her feet went from itchy to red to scabby to swollen to pussy to frozen and back. She left a trail of swamp around the house. Her ears began to swell. The chilblains were spreading.

Meanwhile the muse and Him were busting bottle caps for her attention and she had no choice but to un-movingly stay. She had to find a place to meet The Vent. She asked if it'd like to meet at a Starbucks in Ashland. The Vent agreed.

Ashland was one hour away and Age was looking for an excuse to go. She craved a coffee house and some strangers to snub. She was starving for unwanted male attention and bad pastries. She found the agreed-upon meeting point, applied her second-favorite YSL lipstick, wiped her nose, and watched the door.

They say heat rises. She wrenched up until her neck creaked. Eventually a waft swooned over her. The Vent was neither bearded nor hairless. It seemed to emit from all sides at

once. Her knees buckled in its overwhelming warmth.

Age was underwater. Her nostrils filled Lake Superior.
Her feet told her to stay and feel.

The doctor said the pills would cause drowsiness but passing out in a café was beyond roofies example.

She had missed The Vent. *Fuck*. She gave up and dialed some numbers. Eventually some numbers dialed back and she agreed to meet the guy another day.

A

I am drunk and watching the sunset in its very early
stages

how many days will it take?

She pushes her mind

no they wont write that, they'll write she lost her mind.

The thing must occur

it will never work. That way will never work.

The Vent

Yummy.

Hey there lass.

My name is Knute. (Kuh-noot).

...would you consider yourself girly, i.e. do
you like to paint your toes?

You seem to be the only atheist in...

This message made me confused.

...you sound like kind of a pain in the ass

It's a match!

Okay you look like all kinds of interesting and cool, I'd like to get to know you, how about a drink? Nighttime or daytime drink, even milk.

She stopped on the golfing image and slowly typed a response.

Hi Dick,

I'm flattered. I lied about where I reside. I actually live in the village of Silver Bay, Wisconsin. Still interested in a tall glass of milk?
I'm Age.

There's gotta be at least one interesting landmark. I'm not Dick though. Dick is the captain of a ship. I'm Marshall. Nice to meet you Age.

Dear Dick Marshall,

I wonder, I think there is a Wal-Mart in Ashland. Do you need to lurk around family aisles and collect middle-income debris?
Age

Bonjour Age,

I was looking to buy some particleboard for my dumpster.
So how does someone end up in Silver Bay? And yes, still interested.
Marshall Dick

Marsh Dick,

The best way to end up in Silver Bay is to watch Cabin In The Woods, part three (Patient Zero) and then get on your spaceship toilet and flush. It will take you to a bar named Fish Lipp's that has the cheapest beer I've ever met. Here's my number so you can send me (at least) 3 selfies, so I know what I'm getting into.

XXX-XXX-XXXX

Age

Age de Lune,

Fish Lipp's sounds amazing. My family comes from humble backgrounds, I'm afraid, and we never upgraded to spaceship toilet. I must call you out on your presumptuousness, for I do not have a

phone with a camera. Thank you for the number. If you have an e-mail I can have my junk e-mail send you a picture.

M.D.

Dear Michael Douglas,

This email is only used for strange men to send me random junk mail that may or may not look like them. Please do not use it for any other purpose. xxx@xxx.com

Age

Michael Douglas?

I'll make sure to send you 3 pictures that look like the same man.

My number is XXX-XXX-XXXX so you don't feel left out.

Dick Big

Yeah Right,

Great, I appreciate someone who considers those who have not.

I'm going to take my ritual salt bath at dusk. Enjoy your turkey dinner. It's been lovely.

Against Michael Douglas Fan Club

President

Rejected?

No turkey tonight. You didn't like the pictures?

Marshall

Marshall,

I just responded to you, him, them, via my fake email account.

Before my bath, tell me, what is it that you study?

Age

Wife of Bath,

I study magic, but not the words and symbols kind, the alchemist and ancient astrologist kind. I study it in the context of mass scale i.e. chemical engineering. I hope to one day turn trash into something else.

Marshall

Mayor Bloomberg,

Ok so here's a plan: We meet somewhere random and in the middle. If it goes well, I'll take you to Fish Lipp's. It's a small town. Everyone knows everything. I can't really mess with that, unless we devise a likely story. Which could be fun.

Age

Small Town Girl,

I'm all for stories. The thought of going to a cabin in the woods to meet a stranger is a little cliché. So when?

Marshall

Age needed a break to breathe and allow her pragmatic self to intervene. Silence and then:

Marshall,

Sunday. I'll have to think about this for a minute. The story bit. I should also tell you that I have a history of walking out within the first twenty minutes of any given first date. So it may be worth your while to answer the below questions, to save the drive if necessary. I'm fairly certain you're inoffensive, but I am suspicious of men as a rule. I'm sure the general enslavement of women can give you some idea as to why.

do you believe white people rule?

do you have sex in order to have an orgasm?

do you think women are useful?

do you enjoy being served?

Many thanks in advance.

Age

Age,

1. No, I'm not white.
2. Yes and no. Orgasms feel good, but sex is more than just penetration and orgasms.
3. Yes, women are useful. I've been beat by women at more than one thing.
4. Do I like being served like a servant? No. Sexually? Sure, if the circumstances dictate, i.e. a fetish between two people.

My questions are: are you perceptive of others general moods and feelings? If you have a disagreement with someone on any topic, how do you respond?

Marshall

Marshall,

I am very good at reading people and situations. I believe in an ethics of contingency in communication. I respond with curiosity and honesty, taking both my subjective experiences into account as well as that of the person with whom I debate. I prefer to engage questions in order to create more questions, however I don't sugar-coat things and have strong beliefs on certain subjects.

Age

Age,

Strong beliefs are good. I agree, on certain subjects things are very black and white. I struggle to come to strong conclusions at times though and I admire those who can. I'm glad I passed your preliminary exam.

Marshall

Magician,

I'd hope you'd have this difficulty you are a scientist after all.

Age

High Priestess,

Thanks. How is the salt bath?

Marshall

Harass,
I haven't gotten as far as the shaker. I've opted for a fire-side
beer and chat with some magic online.
Deer lick

Wet,
I've been watching interviews of my role models.
What kind of beer are you drinking?
Dry

What?
South Shore Nut Brown Ale.
Who are you watching?

Daniel Day-Lewis,
Nut Brown Ale sounds good.
M

SERIOUSLY,
The actor?

Ya he's my favorite.
Believe it or Not

OMG,
Why?
Refusing to believe

Not God,
You can put two characters of his next to one another and they
don't seem like the same person.

BLOCK HIM REPORT HIM SPAM

She was getting ready for the big Friday night fish fry when
she received this text:

HOW'S THIS FOR A BACKSTORY: I WRITE FOR A PARANORMAL ACTIV-
ITY BLOG AND IM IN THE AREA INVESTIGATING YOUR BIG FOOT
CLAIM.

Against her better judgment Age arranged to meet Daniel
Day Lewis on Sunday at Two Harbors Bar and Restaurant.
The place reminded her of Twin Peaks, it even had a fire-
place made of petrified wood.

Age continued to dress as she imagined Him, Them, Kel-
logg, and Jack.

CHAPTER FOUR

NIGHT TERRORS

The woman didn't know, couldn't know who was feeling her up. She didn't have a moment to note the identity of her contact. She needed a better lens. One that was without alcohol stains or hairball breath. Her frenzy lasted as long as it took him to finish. When it was over for him, it was a new country for her. A remote control changed the height and velocity of the black helicopter hovering tree line.

She barely heard its batter.

She stirred dough while the second man took turn.

She breathed through the bag deeply.

It was light, a different day maybe. She was seated at a bar the last time she had eyes. Now she was face down. Maybe naked. There was no way to tell. The forest crunched her tail. Attempting movement provided reason for a new swing to the back of her head. Her face skipped against the ground.

Frozen, she felt asleep for the first time since she had been brainwashed, raped and beaten, taken to the zone for arrival.

A

Sex had been off her mind. She had spent so many months falling in love with A. and doing nothing about it that she began to forget her old sex-want.

Back at moms cabin she lay on the table and lapped Nut Brown ale out of a half-burned bottle. She remembered a recent penis encounter. Total offence was one way of putting it. Inability to acknowledge was another. Bored of extensions. Dial me down. Get me out of here. Tell the doctor to write a note. Call Mom.

He opened the door in American Apparel panties. *Ugh*, she thought. *Where's your artwork?* She asked.

In here, in bed, he continued, *wait let's talk I want to know everything! Wait there's no time to talk.*

Admittedly Age hadn't done a very good job at being a booty, even though she'd made the call. The least she could do was talk.

But the erection came between them like a mysterious pen leaking ink on an airplane. She didn't know where to put it and suspected the naturally and unnaturally high altitude for destroying/exploding it.

It being one of her favorites. And now It was all over her face, hands, and clothing. She thought this through while he grilled her on her recent affairs.

Since then, every blood filled penis she encountered was a demand and the act of penetration a negotiation of will. It was depressing and seemingly unavoidable. She let it take her on and never played another game of beer pong again.

Hungrily nostalgic for intimacy via no-touch love, Age recalled how they'd met.

A. would call on Age early and often, *Hi it's your neighbor, come over.*

Next day, *coffee?* The invitation repeated, bringing her over, three months later.

Age smote and sighed as she recalled their court.

A. acted friendly. Then she'd antagonize with diva treatment.

A. read Sade on the train or baked apple crumble for a bedtime snack.

A. gave Age dark pink lipstick to cover her mouth hooks and scars, from years ago.

A. cared and watched. She'd sent hundreds of cat gifs at the beginning of each day and end of each night, and usually the happy two had spent the between-kitty movement in time together.

Poisoned, she chopped wood for round three. Fire heat was the only way to keep the cabin warm. In the end The Vent didn't do it. She needed to feed the flames and keep the iron stomach fed with the reality of wood. Her head was a wagon full of horses hoofing a noosed neck from the inside. The night before she'd swallowed three gin and tonics waiting for Dick to show.

Age had been early, sandwiched between a woman waiting for news, called Scoop, who ran *Live Wires*, and Jeanie, a regular.

They watched a show in which an imbecile paraded on a giant laptop playing found youtube videos of self-harming scenes. There was no prize, leaving a simple and empty premise.

The three women collectively decided which pixelated hero hurt most, thus winning their hack approval. By the time Marshall showed, Age was blitzed and had forgotten their likely story. She introduced him, he popped in line.

Age talked too much and Marshall met her gaze with a discerning recycled amusement. She met him like topical cream. He listened hoping it would lead to a lay.

She knew, as he lied about his twenty-five years, that she wouldn't take him anywhere.

On the way out she pet the parking lots pussy, kissing a few times. He made some loose promises to see her before exams. While he spoke to himself, she blinked, imagining under half-closed lids, his big boy body under her. Marshall could screw her in two.

She felt his heat. He wanted to taste her in more ways than his mouth manners allowed. She knew he would work her into a thousand flavors. She had already found that twenty-four-year olds were unafraid of caloric spooning, a result of little experience with pain. She liked that about them best. Feeling the pressure of a large form sticking her thigh, Age let him caress her tender breasts with a hot mouth before

Squirming goodbye she drove the twenty-minute shoreline to the next bar.

The Come Back Inn had three remaining customers that also happened to work there. Age walked into an employee party.

Age! Comere and meet my brother Marty! The funny brunette who Age knew as Brenda turned to Marty and whispered, *Marty this is the woman you've been waiting for. Please ask her out. Please!*

Age drank whiskey neat and eyed the silent bartender coolly, an obvious northwoods dyke.

Brenda was an annual trip and Age liked her. Age took a gulp and decided to match Brenda with a few self-effacing remarks, even called herself out on being wasted, going on an internet date, and driving drunk. Everyone laughed, Brenda especially.

Marty, here's a question for you, Age braved, There's a wifi option near my house called NSA Surveillance, is it a joke?

Brenda shrieked, *Marty works for NSA, it's real, teller Mart.* He shrugged, looking down at the antique Samsung swinging around his neck, *Yeah it's real, and they're not too bright.*

I don't work for NSA, he continued, I did special ops, some of us worked for NSA, but not me. Anyways, you should know that no one evil lives here. Silver Bay is a good town.

Huh. On the way home Age drove behind Marty and gave him plenty of space. They lived in the same town and his camera watched her suspiciously. She drove hand over eye.

As she rolled up the phone rang. She couldn't remember the conversation afterwards, because she was busy eating popcorn and cookies in bed. She thought it was nostalgic

and went something like, ...*when I saw your profile...ways...real life....beautiful...in person...*

She woke up dry, darting the hang over to chop wood.
It was one reason to get out of Bed Vent.

The recent splash of local cuisine had mixed her insides.
Age got ill. A hang over binge that included junkie meals inspired by the Schwanz woman had left her with nightmares.

The first was pure horror: *Chainsaw Massacre* meets *Session 9* meets *High School Shooter*. The second was bad, so bad it lived in her day, she couldn't recall it, and wouldn't know what it meant even if she could.

Age gave into her sleep-imaging remote and tried to feel okay. Her stomach was a giant bloated seed. She got rid of salt with coffee. She put her head on the table and thought uselessly of A. Age knew what the problem was. Age had no follow-through.

Age Focus. Focus Age. Four shows, one job interview, four men on the line, one swollen body, and she kept the fire going. She had reverted to the status of early man. She refused gathering as a premise and had always been suspicious of collectors. Age was a hunter. She hunted for wood in order to burn it.

Alder burned faster than she could cut and this satisfied every masoch tendency in Age. The fire burned.

She outlined the plan. She tried. She listed. *Define target, focus, follow through.* Such things were impossible for Age, she'd rather make a mean joke or seduce someone boring.

She decided to spend the morning on her favorite pro ana tumblr page. **suicidalmoon.**

The caption read:

**Young depressed artist. Pro ana member.
want to find myself.**

**I do not promote self harming. eating
disorders etc. Everybody have they own
Brains and they should use them.**

Age thought it was brilliant. She was pondering the equation when Him rang. She was newly inspired to avoid work.

Yeah, been busy, she replied, *all right, I'll meet you there at seven.*

Age wondered if Him could even go without lunch.

She doubted it. She thought men were ridiculous in their many rituals that usually messed with everyone else's day. She thought of her mom's distaste for cooking.

Her menu was filing up.

THE END OF CHAPTER FOUR

HOW SHE FELL IN LOVE WITH A.

When all else fails, go to Germany. When all else fails, write a novel. When all else fails, write erotica.

A. invited her over to watch a movie. Age lay in bed while

A. putzed around with unwanted internet ads as she streamed *Blue Is the Warmest Color*. Age sipped wine from a pillow as

A. lay down next to her, *this is the love story of the year. Can you translate it into Spanish and make it a little louder?*

A. *no problem, I'll need another drink mid-translation, It's difficult to do love scenes from a third-party perspective.* They had plenty to drink.

Age and

A. lay still and breathed heavily. The movie haunted their desire. They wore new blue hues.

One night after dancing,

Age and

A. spoke in twin tongue. *I'm going to bed, me too, will you read to me before you go, of course I will.*

A. picked out *Moby Dick*, closing her eyes as Age worked to focus her dawn-colored eyes on the page. Age read softly. Without tone, the bed was a frozen lake. When Age was certain A. was asleep, she crept out of the room, went to her apartment and started a fire online. She pretended to be offended by the latest flavor. He was always game to fight. She passed out wondering how she'd gotten here.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMAN vs WOMAN

vs

THE STATE

Two movies back to back; *The Zone*, where desires are fulfilled and *Satan's School of Reform*, where girls learn to love. In each film the heroines claim space on their own terms. They both loved their headmaster and each was born just before and after the coming of Age.

The stomach was an animal. *I want to live in a herd*, she thought out loud. It repeated itself over and over, until she wrote it down in her mind's eye on a single sheet of white paper and then crumpled it up, a closed fist. She wrote.

The stomach is an open wound, an empty leg, cartilage connecting nothing. The stomach is a zone where men feel terror. It is a hostile environment, without blood, it is bile and produce. The stomach bends its placenta-shape into ribs while the mother in the room watches, sickened.

She is hungry, but not for her stomach, she is hungry to be heard. She remains starving in a room of arrogance that

pushes itself up from the walls, through the roots, a radical sacrifice that knows itself only in it's own contingency = Annihilation.

The day was wet. Brown Picturesque. Lots puddled into dry waves. The chairs inside knew the puddles, and greeted them formally without recognition of seating or choice. The puddles lived on others. The chairs lived for them too.

Without rest or dryness, neither was heard. Neither could be hers. The news reflected Age's halibut state. She read Yahoo News.

The woman slaughtered her small army of seven, and another believed to be born still.

They called her a serial killer. *Was it so? Was it real?* Imagine holding it, owning it, knowing it eight times and then the pain and fright and ripping of the flesh, from age twenty to thirty-nine, and placing them wholly and healthily, in a garbage can wrapped in delicate white cloth.

The sacrifice of an army.

The woman was in fluorescent orange, going to jail, a bond set for six million. *Who will she hurt? Who could she hurt in jail without child?* One survived, a daughter during that time. She wore pink.

And then one day an estranged husband found the babies in her garage.

Why was he there? Digging through her things. Of all the wives murdered by their rooting husbands, in the garage uninvited, his garage forever, where babies, maybe his, were buried. And he goes to the police, the elements of their bodies. The state is angry because it's their army to kill. Not hers.

Sacrifice is corrupted by the knowledge of who benefits.

A

After watching both *Young Adult* and *Sex and The City*, Age began to realize how useless it all was. Sure, she'd go for the job. Sure, she'd manage Kellogg's unrealistic want. Sure, she'd bone Him. Sure, she'd teach Marhsall. Sure, she'd keep drinking and getting online and proposing to duct after duck until the cabin burned up and the matriarch stood still. Sure.

But today she couldn't start a fire to save her life and she was charcold. She would have to get there. She decided to bring along two hands for helping: Amber, a bartender from The Come Back Inn, and Scoop, the newspaperwoman. They followed her to the woodpile silently.

I'm hungry, Amber thought.

The wood will give you everything you need, Scoop had it.

How? Amber begged.

You won't. We do. We get together, it's the only way, and if one of us is lost on the trail we won't get back. Won't find the place we're supposed to be. We won't arrive like them, the rest.

Is there a room? Amber wanted.

There is a room, four walls rather. It doesn't make sense because there's no door that you can close, Age reported from inside.

I'm so cold. I'm having a hard time imagining, Amber yelled from way back.

Just keep coming, I said.

I don't believe him anymore than I believe you. Amber swung a giant hip aiming with her axe. The blade wedged the ground and she lurched forward.

Don't play fight, if you war we can't, Scoop annunciated.

Age came to the woodpile alone or first. She began to pile wood onto her cart. The cart began to buckle under his weight. She called to the others to hurry.

Back in the cabin, the women stripped and laid near the fire. Age leaned a sore neck on the inside of Amber's broad thigh. Her toes touched Scoop. Her fingers grazed her own smooth stomach as she shifted to the side. Scoop closed the circle with her mouth open, slightly biting Amber's wrist.

They sprawled, took up all-space, wandered through one another, connected and bare. There was no need for seduction, soft grazing would trick their warm need.

We knew we didn't make it, wouldn't make it, couldn't, shouldn't, we had no desire to it. It was a time from us and our shared capacity in affect. We decided against wood and piles, we touched for heat, we shared our fat for warmth. We made decisions based on skin and open hearts.

Age lounged and leaned over Amber's stomach, placing my mouth between her legs. She moaned as my chin found ground, nose pushing to meet her forward movement. Eyes wide, ceiling directed, she gasped softly and muffled, covered by the full breast of Scoop's foot pushed into

my pussy, fingers pressed into ass, wet with all our wood drenched sweat. We would continue cabin warmth, an abundant between-leg economy.

We moved in worm-rhythm adjusting our speed to each foot to tail tail to mouth mouth to unseen fore to back to tense to let.

Wanting to eat more we tore at one another pillows falling onto head somersaults juiced mouth hairs pulling into fist.

We fought hard and with strength. Aggression moved beyond lake, far fish reaching, patient and combing, to a place where we could all see one another and from one side. We trusted our good faith and saddled up as sweat began to shiver face.

Tickling cunts and hard nipple sucking. We shucked and fucked our way into the kitchen slipping cool water lip to cheek. Amber's large hips glistened fresh pussy ringing and Scoop allowed her hair to fall onto a brown shoulder. She looked away for a moment.

Exquisite, there was sudden danger.

She and we wanted to keep. The politician in me felt protective of this rare beast scene. Verging cliffs they refused to incorporate table talk into their tent. They didn't need it, want it, own it, but the rage would not subside. Sucking bones and placing shelves only made them sharker.

They all three together felt it. It was time for Him to die.

HIM

Him straddled the line between buffet and comfortable place setting. He was like a piece of asphalt, melted butter that stretched forever. He knew when the coffee was done.

Him had a wet nose. He cooked it out like a proper addict. Him never got busted, he only got afghaned. He rushed to the gas station to get a last minute lotto, that's how lucky he felt since Age agreed to meet. He wanted her more. He got some tastes in the boat but that was too fast, he needed more time, less moat motion. More Collaboration. More Community.

Him was dick dreaming when a double-breasted dove swung up.

Hi there, he couldn't stop. What's your name?

Amber.

...Ugh, she played.

Dice, he enamoured. Two in a row. It was Him's lucky summer.

Age dropped by The Village Inn on her way home. Amber was working.

Can I get a whiskey, two fingers deep? Shit. Age forgot, she had a date. She stuck to the bar for the bill.

What's the hurry?...really, he cute?

Yeah you know Him...I'm sure you've seen Him, hangin around Allie's.

Oh, him? No I don't know him really, met Him today, I guess.

Amber looked flushed as she wrote up the check. Age knew that Him had hit. *Whatevs.* She would later admit to herself that it made Him more attractive but she didn't care too much one way or the other. She had a star to climb.

Out with the muse in with the news. She gazed across the table at a strikingly handsome specimen.

More wine? She dropped in with a low hanging bottle.

Thanks.

Do you fish?

Yes, you know I do.

I only know what I've felt and that was no fish.

Well, yeah...

Running over his mouth sounds Age went on, *I was thinking about how it came to be that fish get hooked and I got stuck on their sense of timing. I mean have you ever seen a fish in a hurry? ...just when the salmon swim upstream.*

Well, there's that, Age complied, *but other than mating do you generally think of fish as in a hurry.*

No.

Neither do I, they actually seem sort of cool.

Him picked at his salad. He liked Age and her mind but didn't know where this was going. He eyed her breasts that looked pretty good for an older woman, a little low hanging but those nipples were perfect gumdrops. He swelled.

She continued, *I was thinking about what it takes to hunt. I mean, most of the time, hunters have to wait, and the best hunters*

are incredibly patient.

She blinked hard to make sure he was still with her. *Now let's imagine you're a fish.* She felt his inability to imagine and tried a different line. *Wait, ok. Pause. Tell me, what do you do while you wait?* She looked earnest and expectant.

I...uh...read the paper.

Right! You read the paper. You do something else, while you wait for the thing you want. Because you know that eventually you will have read all the paper, or there will be something else that demands your attention. And during that time you may even forget about the thing you think you want, the thing you're waiting for, because after all it's not in the room.

Anyways, that's the definition of laying in wait. It's a kind of passive hunter. The receiver, as they call the position in football.

Ok, Him said half smiling, his dick was shrinking but he liked the way her eyes lit up, and he imagined pulling that loose ponytail from behind.

And if you're a fish, you lay in wait, patiently passively hunting for your next perfect meal.

Well, I wouldn't call that hunting, Him denied.

Why not?

Because hunting implies a strategy.

Ok, so what is a strategy?

It's a way to get something you want.

Agreed, it's a way. So let's so that the way the fish get the food is by waiting for it to swim by. They wait, just like a hunter.

Age! Where is this going?

So, let's just say, there's a fish and it's hungry and it's sort of swimming and out of nowhere it sees a beautifully colored fish passing by and it decides to take a nibble. The fish goes for it, it begins feasting

upon on its prey and what does it get? A metal hook tearing at the inside of her throat dragging her entire body until she's pulled out of her natural habitat and into the air and onto a boat and then here, onto our table where we can see everything and examine it in great detail or eat it, if we're hungry, and you do that sort of thing.

What's your point?

My point is Him, that you can't know what you're really eating until you're flopping half dead on the table.

With that Age pulled a small sphere from her pocket, and placed the capsule next to Him's plate. Him looked down slowly. He spit once twice and then .

She couldn't wait for courses. She needed him now. Reaching across the long oak table She took one of his hands into hers, focused on a spot next to his eyes, and told him how bad.

She placed his index finger delicately into her mouth. He watched her suck from finger to finger.

He nearly pulled her across the table, but her arm held steady. She inched around to his side of the table, not meeting his gaze. As soon as the table had removed itself from their path, he yanked her forward. She continued to hold hip-heavy, moving only when she felt like it.

With his free arm he cleared a section, placing a single forearm under her, lifting her from the ground to put her lips coolly in his mouth. She allowed him to linger there and set her table.

Blinking he noted her unimpressed lips. He increased the pressure on the back of her neck and pushed his body into

hers, rubbing a palm over the hot magnets poking into his chest.

She layed into his pressure. Rolling her head back and to the side, she closed her eyes and arched her back against his fingertips. Her want swelled.

She slipped her arm under his armpit and brought her knee up gently between his legs. She supported his weight before teetering against the heavy table. She met his eyes and kissed him. They were suspended for a few seconds, balancing one another in an act of hot concern.

Him was surprised at her core strength, but found himself turned up in a way that he hadn't felt in years. He opened his eyes. Her head swooned back. She was gorgeous, high cheekbones glistening, and he knew she was barely in the room. Need wrapped his jaw.

He fell against her against the table through the table against the floor through the floor against the roof through the roof and again, they tumbled through the account and spun a web bare mattress open springs empty closets unflushing faucets doors without handles their desire proceeded home and his need continued to push her down into the ground.

Age accepted certain elemental factors such as How to Relax, Strategies in Self Improvement, and Where the Heart Lives. She found their stereotypes to rock climb her general anxieties in a clownish way.

But she refused his all weight, his all pressure, she refused his lean, aesthetic arms and legs, she refused his apologies for more, she refused his schedule, his lists, his hunger, unending three meal appetite. And together they fell through time into the future.

CHAPTER HALFWAY

BORN AGAIN AND AGAIN AND AGAIN

Him had died a sordid peaceful passing. Once Age used the magic capsule in combination with poppers for dessert, Him mourned Himself. In their wrestle with death they cracked the new fridge. Age called for repairs on his recently dethawed soul. Her writing went unobstructed.

The refrigerator men were cross-haired ducks.

Can you fit? She asked glancing at the truck in her driveway.

Yeah, we just made it round the bend.

Anything I can do? Her mouth curved.

Maybe move those rugs, not sure our cart will go over it.

Sure. She greeted the second mover. Number two was thinner, balding, Clint Eastwood. She knew him from before.

It's goin over in the corner. One instructed two.

Yeah I know, I been here before.

I'm just tellin you what she told me. The bigger one wanted to be a Top.

The thermometer stuck. While mover number one unscrewed the dial, the other began to undress. Plastic

sheathing ripped down and balled up. She pretended not to be aroused by the torn man.

One behind, fiddling. The other in front, bent low, making noise. She stared at the thing between.

One was on his knees, a freezer full of pussy-level. He was fat. An innertube adjusted its heft in the front, tight black t-shirt tucked into baggy blue jeans.

The second man came from behind. Already knew the hole. Unrimmed glasses, high forehead, shallow nose long, a voice so low it was drag.

She liked number two behind her. She let him grip her breasts. With a Phillips head he unscrewed her zipper, socks, and shoes. He bent her over the kitchen sink and rammed. Slamming the new door, he screwed her warming freezer burn.

Grabbing a jar of applesauce, she dipped three fingers in and spread his cheeks. She opened the door wider and dodged the latest plug, slipping out of him. Circling around, she maneuvered the Phillips head to get a handle on his insides.

Turned out, he was an emotional mess, a bag of loose tools. She gave him a new handle on life and watched him walk out the door covered in a fresh coat of Saran wrap.

CHAPTER SIX

WHAT DID SHE WANT?

She yelled along with Melissa Ethridge to *I'm the Only One*. The Suburu had adopted a shade of army green. It acquired a new stealth lizard vision. She slid into a spot at Allie's feeling fresh.

Good morning, good morning, the chorus sang. Blue haired on top of the gossip, there was nothing the Silver Bay oracles didn't see. Communal hot coffee was their staple, and like Age, they lived in fear of the general jinx.

Age listened carefully: *Look, the sun! NO, don't say it too loud! You'll scare it...can you believe she still wears tights under her slacks?*

Age looked down at the ring of powder sugar framing French toast that looked altogether off white and dry. She'd imagined dark syrupy messes, thick in egg yolk and butter. The reality was a dry twinkie. She made up with some eavesdropping.

Together they sang like pigeons hawk: *Christ almighty get a cabin!...c'mon now a travel trailer isn't as big as a class C, but it's got the benz logo, I hear it runs better....you mean all I gotta do is put a benz sign on my car and it'll run better? yephahahaha...*

Top ya off? One of the men braved her lonely corner. *Yes, thank you.*

He was one of two men that acknowledged her.

She tried to disappear by busying herself with a pen and paper, but knew she was the odd ball. She gazed out the window and missed her herd.

She wanted to feel kept up, cared for. She wondered if she should finally give in. Let Him have it. Or let her have Him.

What's a woman doing alone? She heard them chirp. She tipped Sue one hundred percent on her way out.

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE WAY WE WERE NEVER

Him and Age picked up at home. It'd been a week since their teeter-totter affair and they became a together game. Age let Him. She wrote and disappeared from time to time. Him didn't mind.

They made love on the table to keep things on the up and up, out and open. And while they hid nothing, they didn't go out of their way to communicate the rest. Age thought she had finally found someone who could outlive her hostility.

Kellogg, The Vent, and all others fell aside, once she began to live in time.

She watched Him chop wood, soak feet, make stews with sauerkraut, and listen to the radio. Him loved listening to the radio like he loved a pinch of salt in coffee. NPR was his station and he chewed with his mouth wide open.

She grew used to a flowing hum of pet peeves.

If I can take this...

Age read and wrote and took long walks down to the beach and around. She fantasized about everyone she met, reconfiguring the way she'd approach Him each night. She recognized Him over and over in her daydreams. She figured she'd picked right this time. She began to tell Him her story.

I had a very bad time and haven't played house since,
she hesitated. He fed her lettuce slicked in olive oil and

garlic, between words. Slowly chewing, she went on,
*I met him at Columbia University, where I met some of the best,
and the worst. He knew about art and I fell into a deep love. Turned
out he had a few other girlfriends in other states, one of my teachers
confronted him and finally one of my friends found him in the act.
I lost my mind, mostly because he wanted to make me think I was
crazy. I had to go to therapy twice a week to come back to life.
It ended in a botched abortion and terrible infection. I bled every
day for six months.*

Him held her face as she spoke. He gently put her hand on
his hip and leaned against the kitchen counter. He kissed her
forehead. Him felt in moment. Age felt a stem taking hold.
Her throat began to tighten. She pushed Him away and
went to the bathroom.

Stop please

She turned the heat on high and ran the water as she
shook silently. She looked at a thinned out face, a face that
no longer knew what it meant to trust just enough. Thin to
the point where bad investments were the only investments.
She cried wolves all over the yard and screamed into a lice-
covered bedspread. Him knocked gently as she tore her face
apart.

Hey, you ok? Can I come in? He asked.

I'm feeling soaked with something I can't recognize, she screamed
from behind her walls, inside.

Let me in please, I want to hold you.

She cracked the door and Him slipped in as smoothly as
a waft of heat or fog. He wrapped her in a warm towel and
placed himself carefully on the edge of the tub, beside her.

Finn, she said, I want you to feel me. I want you to imagine what's it like to be me. I want you to touch my pain, rip me up, and make me feel bruised in a way that's good.

Him smiled, squeezed her thigh and told her he would wrap all she had, touch all she wanted, and take all of her long and endless comings.

Age had an interview. She was devastated. It was the first or third time she'd have to decide, career or love.

She knew which would win. She knew things would take care of themselves if she waited. The ebb and flow of fear in the shallow side of the pool would drown the voices one way or another.

The wood was too wet. The heat through smoke was minimal in comparison. She filled the tub with salt water and took her nightly bath.

Avoiding all prospect of foot itch, she left her wool socks at the door, naming them Interview and Body. She weighed herself. She was 2.5 lbs less than she'd been a month ago. She'd been starving herself daily. She named the absence after Him. Then she went waterboarding.

She tried not to think in the tub. Her brain, sky and dirty water made gray, a puddles' iridescent edge. Her foot began to itch like crazy. She knew she'd need to take another pill to sleep. She vaguely remembered a time when she would act out her dreams as if the muscles wouldn't shut down.

One night she woke up with the crack of her nose against the molding next to the bed. She quickly realized that her

dream was no longer a dream and that the blood would come. She filled a blue towel and cried softly into the mirror. She couldn't imagine how much someone had to hate themselves to self-harm in their sleep. It felt like a new record at the time.

Back, she heard a door open and close.

Hey! A holler. She said nothing, mouth under water. She waited, a Loch Ness monster. She heard him perusing the rooms, finally a few steps and the door opened.

Who's there? He said.

Nessie, she replied.

Nessie who?

Orange you glad I didn't say Jaws?

Oh, that nessie.

With that he closed the door shouting, *I'm making you dinner, don't come out.*

They played endlessly, without effort or intellect. The night before, Him had buried her pursuit of happiness beneath loads of semen cake. She picked up the phone playing some role.

Hello? She stated loudly, *No, Age isn't here.*

Ok, can you please find her? I think I remember her saying she'd be hiding, he hollered back.

Ok fine, hold on, moving her face away from the phone for a few seconds, getting back on, *Hi this is Age.*

Give it to me, he demanded.

Who?

Her, he stated.

Her. Yeah ok, she can give it to you. I'm not home anyways.

Yes you are, I just drove by and saw your car.

So get it if you want it so badly.

I do. I need her. I can't sleep without her. Hey, have you seen the book I'm reading? He broke character.

Um, I don't know what you're talking about. The man I fuck can't read or write. He can only please me.

Hey, I'm serious. Where's my book?

You mean you're made-for-TV read-along?

The Hunger Games was not made for TV.

Sure, I saw it in the oven next to my face.

Liar.

Of course the book was hidden in a naked pillow. Just between her sweat-drenched thighs. She yawned and lingered, oil pools in her belly button. His hair looked good on her chest, she liked his headrest. She noted his straight nose hooking her nipple as he made her into a trumpet's mouth-piece. She knew this was the end of some chapter. She didn't want to leave her body behind, but she had to make space. She had to leave for the Other Woman.

CHAPTER EIGHT

FUCK NOMADS

The airport was an interesting place for Age. She despised everyone so much she could nearly ignore her foot rot. She missed her cabin. She missed silence. She thought twice about Him.

She realized that one of the reasons she was bad at the job of Girlfriend was because she refused the institution of girlfriend. It dawned on her that she wasn't jealous of other women, she was furious with the way whomever she dated used them as tools to build worth.

Acknowledgment was what everyone wanted, any crappy manager knew that. But Age knew best. That people would do anything to please. They loved giving. They wanted to have something to give. She was interrupted by Dirito Muncher.

Throwing his head back, mouth open, full of soft yellow chip shards, he sat there, an affront to Age. It was all she could do to not kick him with the latest flight magazine. Her feet knawed like cannibals. Why did she feel Him itch from so far?

She knew why.

At weeks end the various flights ran over her. She pilled and scratched. She interviewed and snapped. She drank and won. They tried to touch her too much and then she lay in a hotel pool.

She stopped by New York for a quick passing out. Before she fainted she met with many, drank gallons of booze and walked for miles. Her Hellraiser feet went away. Her body became a bus.

She felt an overwhelming love for other artists. She lost interest in everything around them. She could only see artists and their broken hearts. *Where would they go? How would they survive in this dumb ugly town?* She had no idea. She left cursing the glorification of nomad.

The return was quickened with anxiety. She didn't move. When she got back to Silver Bay, Him was no longer together.

Amber approached her with a face, pink and pushy.

What will your confession get me? Age said, backing away. She'd been through this before and had zero interest in being a victim or soundboard.

Age went blank firewall. She turned around, got in her car and drove home. She dialed his number and upon his call, she answered, wanting to know about Him, the truth. The line went dead.

The next phone call she made was to blank, *Yes I'd love to take the job. Thank you for the offer and I apologize for the delay in response.* There it was, sealed. Nothing could sauce her chops,

nothing could stop her from leaving Him. Her umbrella had been ready for days and she didn't need to care anymore.

Him wasn't even there. Him had become a refrain, and she couldn't stomach the wait. They met for dinner.

His eyes stilled the wobbling table as she stared at the spicy rice dish. She quietly gave the waiter her phone number while Finn went to the bathroom for the last time.

She said goodbye, in her mind's papered eye. *No surprise there*, she thought, as she opened the pain screen again.

NEXT. Ryan was on it. She could always rely on him. *Listen, you're life just did a 180, you got a job, a good job, and now you go do your thing. You're good. Focus.*

She ate some yoghurt and toyed with texting the waiter. She avoided the table, the bathtub, things colored amber, and others that would arouse chest pains. She missed Him as she missed them all. Her mantra remained a solid Next.

As the temperature rose, the heat became unnecessary. Age began to run the triangle daily. Spring arrived.

Hey baby! The yellow-tipped Jack Russel padded its way across the newly graveled road.

His name is Spotty, a soft Irish accent spilled from the tight lips of a wide brown face, ten feet away. She looked at his dog as she spoke to him, *I'm Age. You're adorable.*

He took her look and cast it down the street. She told him to have a great day. She wanted to know how to get inside that dog-eyed accent but sensed certain unavailability. Another Next.

She had some time. She did some writing. She had lived a few lives so far. She wanted to feel time like there wasn't. She opened a noon beer and her latest obsession.

Broad City was a series made by two comedians that happened to be in love with one another. It was sweet, tantalizing, well written, but one-way. She was hungry for smart rage. She decided to compare it to the new series *Fargo* and found too much taming in its foreshadowing. The cereal was getting more and more stale.

What was their point? What was anyone's point? Age was getting sick of half-baked bread. She decided to attend the town meeting instead.

Age had a knack for making plans, roaming around all day waiting for them to occur and then, just before they began, bailing.

She used to do this daily in New York. Some called it bad planning, she called it the flight part of "fight or flight". She enjoyed musings, anticipation, waiting around, but she did not appreciate the thing itself. On the rare occasions that it actually happened to her, she was where she was supposed to be at a certain point in time, she was miserable and found a reason to walk out.

In this case it was the town meeting. She was early, the sun was going down. A couple, two women, moved down the beach seemingly without time. They were happy. She was alone, and, for the first time in awhile, felt it. She eyed them with envy, they seemed far away. Age half-stood and half-

crawled to the lodge where the meeting was to take place in thirty minutes.

She read the agenda on a bulletin board in the parking lot. Her options were few. She could wait in the lot, or go to one of the two bars on the corner. Age wasn't drinking and didn't feel like packing cheese curds, she turned around and began the walk home.

On her way, nearing her driveway, she spotted, not less than ten feet from her, a large gray owl, its feathers puffing. It rotated its head in her direction and followed her approach, eyes yellowing. It was so bored.

She stopped, took some photos for Mom and then realized how odd it was that a giant owl would be sitting two feet off the ground, near a dirt road in the middle of the day. She was four feet from it now and it barely looked at her.

She had read somewhere that seeing an owl during the day meant that someone close to you would die or that you were dying.

There was no doubt, Age was spooked. She ate another cookie while watching deer eat birdseed. She was hoping that her new witch status would grant her the gift of clairvoyance, but the pizza was still frozen and in its wrapper. Her stomach would be puffy for a day or two the phone probably wouldn't ring.

She wondered how the NEXThing and the texting were related. She wondered if the owl knew about how many men she'd gone through in the last month. She wondered what kind of moon would sally her forth in a blood bed tonight. She wondered if the refrigerator men would suck on her neck as Marshall watched from a window and the waiter

brought her another bowl of spicy rice.

Him was nowhere to be found in this equation because he had gotten her story. He heard part of her history that was as boring and drawn out as a scar. Stereotype surround sound.

She waited for the animals to leave, unwrapped the pizza, put on some eye shadow and continued reading *Fifty Shades of Grey*.

He looked down as he said, *I didn't have enough to write.*

It was his day finally, he had been waiting and waiting, a lurker, a shadow writer, a wordless begged her. He didn't understand what they all kept saying, *To write is to write the unknown.*

Was it like a painting? He asked.

No, they said, *it was not like a painting.*

Was it like listening to the shouts of a tortoise? He asked.

No, they said, *it was like divining into a pool.*

Oh, he said.

Anyways, he didn't have time to delay with this. He needed to finish. He had a deal and an intern and a clock hammer radio program. He needed to do it. Now. There was no more time. No more equal. He left her on the side of the bed, a toaster oven overheated. He had had to leave her or else he would've strangled her. Maybe even killed her.

They liked to discuss his gray eyes that smoldered with desire and the ability to make big decisions. Why did women always want to be owned and then struggle helplessly against the demand? It was the conundrum of the consumer. Desire unpolished. He laughed at them mostly, their lack of self-control, inability to read a situation that wasn't soggy with emotional support, or the ability to communicate. They had no patience. He dealt in numbers, contracts and new deals.

He would have laughed in her face as she lay to the side, asphalt in hair, he would have renamed her Reindeer and called out her names as he drove off. There was no dust to settle around her broken limbs. He loved the idea of giving her pain and then making it okay.

He had to be honest with himself. He loved it when the lines were this close together. He loved the way her eyes moved over his page, held fast to his bind, believed in his cover.

He married the prospect of this historical process, this ability to undue and build. He wanted to own each and every reader. He returned their furtive marginal glances with a blank inch. He wanted more space, he would build an empire of marginal desire. He would use their seven dollars and ninety-nine cents to host decades of debaucheries and list them on the torso of each fresh set of tits he moved through. It was a great plan. It was the only plan.

I had fallen out of Age. I could no longer find her. She never came, she never spent, she held onto her money and clothes and drugs. Age passed slowly and without method. I took a walk down to the beach but she was no longer in the sand or air. The beach wood was good for that.

I was getting cold following a man and his white dog. I was feeling itchy in the groin. I needed someone to battle my pussy, to hurt me. Since the job went through, there was nothing to be done but self annihilate. There was only one exit strategy from that kind of validation. The job. Plan B knew that and acted accordingly. It never trusted the first way or how everyone got in.

I knew where Age was of course. She was in her third meal up north when I lost her. I tried to track her desire with keystrokes and golden bird beaks. She wouldn't accept my bad wrap job or puffy toes. She rejected me over. She imposed a likeness to me that was never profiled. There was no contract. No NDA. I was sick and tired of it and in the end let her roll off the edge.

CHAPTER NINE

LAST LOOK SHADOW

.

can we erase it like a day?

SHAVE HER he shrieked.

shave her

CHAPTER TEN

RETURN OF VENT

is it okay if I take this?

yeah, sure.

really it's not too big for just me?

no, go ahead.

As I waited for Him to dissolve in rest, I played touch and go with the pretty waiter, long curly dark hair with shaved sides wrapped up in a bun. He was deep play. Because of his willing desire to bunt, I took him to be brave or off-limits. He was brave.

I dropped my number off and took a week or so to chill the air around Mom's cabin, he made his move –I'm back in Duluth btw.

The text shook her hair. She was dying to celebrate with someone. Her self-help couldn't keep up. –I got wheels.

They met in Fish Lipp's parking lot way past her bedtime. He unpacked from the sides of his bike and walked towards her hair whistled. –That's serious. She couldn't help exhaling at the sight of hair high riding black motorcycle thighs undoing. It was hot. –Follow me it's not too far.

Gustav was Norwegian. Grown on Wisconsin farmland in the family for a century. He had a broad forehead, high as a Viking's, hazel eyes - almond and heavily lidded, soft and pretty cheekbones - a skull ripple, large berry-colored lips with uncertain edges with a quick fade to the mouth around. Age thought he was lovely.

His frame was strong and twenty-seven. Metabolism moving he didn't need to eat. He was balanced finding a late in life desire to question. It was easy.

She kissed him at the fire. -This is my first one nightstand, he repeated, after going over his sexual history. -How can you be so sure? She meant about that one night, then looked at him warily and told him she thought things were probably okay but hadn't been tested in a year and slept with at least one liar since.

After he shouted and cried and giggled inside her she was unsure about her ability to kill the life with copper. She was nervous about a child for the first time post-IUD. He held her closely, falling asleep as a mayfly dies.

She believed she could live there for a flies-ever-life.

She dreamt in fuchsia as he woke her up with a hand on her breast, tongue amid cunt. Her dream went from oozy morning light to bursting sped-up gulp. Her hand found his tendrils as he sucked. Her fingers worked the back of his

neck, pushing his erect tongue farther into her, a trembling jello pile. Her lids shuddered from blue to light as he spent time licking gently at her wet bursting lips and pointed nipples. They worked in sync; he wouldn't let her out of his mouth as he pushed his hard on into her tensing thighs. She demanded him harder; one fist found her mouth and she licked gently at his fingertips while she hummed and fingered her clit between his lips.

He looked at her boldly she told him to cum he quietly burst, eyes pronouncing nothing she reorganized his excited state into one more shovel. He landed a still lake on her side. –Did you cum? –Yes. –When? –When you gave me that look. His eyes bulged re-life. –You made no sound. –No one has ever looked at me the way you looked at me.

They grumbled up brunch, she cooked and he flattered, eating her tasteful mediocrity. They sat on the kitchen counter and talked shop. –Define earnest. –Earnest? Is that even a word? –Ok, define generous. –Generous can only be defined by mutual recognition.

Age was impressed, she pushed the analysis –What's your problem with authority? Is it because you don't trust people? –I trust that people act from a place of fear. But (smiling) yeah, I've heard it before.

Age enjoyed the fact that they spoke of their mothers between lovemaking. Things always began and ended with Mom.

He kissed her softly and refused to watch her work. He finished the dishes and asked for a shower. –Let's go

outside and play first.

He threw on rubber boots and reorganized her woodpile. He was a perfect teacher. —All this wood is rotten, it won't burn. Age was shocked and laughed at her ignorance, she thought there was something about the way the woodpile looked, uneven in its too-red edges. She helped him throw it out and asked for a lesson.

They went to the chopping block. He showed her how to let the axe do the work. —Smaller cuts with less force work better. She listened, concluding that it would take more time. This kind of quality harped on her nerves and she knew that she needed to listen more and better.

She let him small chop the good wood as she busily sawed dry edges at the picnic table. He wanted to see her or be seen by her at all times. It felt like love, this kind of sharing. She didn't really want him to leave. So he didn't. Gustav and Age spent two nights in a hazy vacuum punctuated by thinking through things in layers of pizza and six packs building solid warmth.

He didn't need any unforeseen expensive tricks. He didn't require anything in the excess. He was bashful when she viewed him from across the room. It was a moment when he showed her age. She felt like she could support this insecurity. She wanted to learn more. She wanted him to stay. She proposed they take a ride down to the town beach.

It was the end of spring and the wind had blown in mini glaciers rubbing up against the shoreline. The air was frigid

on their chapped lips. They played along the shore, stepping on fragile islands made of vertical hanging crystal plumage. It was a precarious day, cleavage declaring certain layers of melt or no melt. She couldn't look him in the eye.

—It took me awhile but I finally learned that you should never ask for what you want directly. You remind me of a human calculator that understands all of the different ways people take things and work from this view of multiplicity. So my question is, do you ever say what you want outright? —I like to think I do, he responded, but I probably don't.

Age loved 'human calculators.' They knew how to get what they thought they wanted and she admired this, but she also knew from experience that they never added fast enough, could never equate with the paranoid possibilities before them. They never finished projects. Never said I love you. They were consumer in capital. They never.

She liked them because they were similar to her in that she also didn't know what she wanted and liked others to do some of this decision-making, in hopes of a surprise. But calculators wanted control and that was their difference. Power never came from force.

They played role until the awareness that their dialogue wouldn't go farther than another day began to touch them. They needed to get out, get on and wash down. They sped the two miles back to mom's cabin and fell into a shower without looking at one another.

—Do you know the butt rub trick? He smiled openly at her. —No, but I don't want you to tell me, if anything you'll have

to just do it.

He did just that. Soaping her from behind, he quickly turned, holding onto the shower wall he began to speed bounce against her fleshy bump. She couldn't stop giggling as he worked at a low ride bounce. –You're fun, she spat, as she caught a breathy laugh and towel-dried them both.

Later she asked him for a photo shoot. He agreed. She directed him to putz around with his shirt off and then with his motorcycle. –There's not much putzing left, the next thing I do is leave. –Ok then leave.

She photographed a slow loss, beginning with him moist and shirtless in old jeans, hair swaying to one side he leafed through *LIES journal of materialist feminism* in dull kitchen light.

Throwing on shirt, wool pullover, and jean jacket he packed *Imago*, by Octavia Butler, a sci-fi book Age gave him, and grabbed the large black helmet.

She asked him to slow down as he got on his bike and then asked him to stay still as he revved the engine. Just after he turned the lights on, she walked up to him and lifted his helmet screen, –Are you really leaving? –I think so. –Ok, bye Gustav. –Goodbye Age.

They kissed long lasting. She, and then he, gave a short wave as he rolled off, honking through the driveway.

It was her last night in the cabin. She knew that life would tumble over her and the only tools of defence were the ones

that looked like bank ads. She needed to take those photos of Gustav so she could let him go.

And he somehow knew that. He felt her need and fear of loss and let her objectify his stereotype. They both acknowledged their desire to give and please others, understanding that in order to give you must first understand how to allow the opportunity to give manifest itself. That giving felt best.

They shared these thoughts as she recorded stills, slowing them down, slowing her down. Letting them simmer in a book that would never write.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

CAME COME .COM

On her very last day she received an email from her mother.

Subject: OMG, brainstorm!

10:50 AM (2 hours ago)

To: me

I'm going to rent my house out next summer! Yayyyyyy.

I've been exploring condos and rentals and nice ones are more than my mortgage. This would be perfect!!!!!!

--

M. Wiig

Manager

XX School of XX and Public XX

Age couldn't tell which house her mother wanted to rent, but it seemed that one home wrecked would enable better dreaming. Age smiled.

For as long as Age could remember her mother drew plans for homes. They were on every backside of every piece of paper in the house. She watched her mom's lovely hands detail a bathroom to the rear, a screen porch out front, the

sinks and cabinets and hallways that could later become French doors to more rooms not yet imagined. Her mother drew out the social with plans and projections. Her mother, like Age, loved from afar.

She wondered how it would change, this dream cottage, a proof pudding scenario that could actually unfold her mother's desire. She felt near-guilt, having inhabited her mother's dream space for nearly six weeks. She wondered if she was also a part of this far-reaching arm. The arm that went beyond exchange. The arm that Mom built with her egg and tissues and love, in and out of the deep heat of Her.

There was some painful egret. Some reminder of her own failures. The wheel when unjust. The word refrain daily mixed tape that people used to look over and under, never eye metal. She stared at the drawing, clutched her stomach, yelled at the wet pile. She waited for her eyes to adjust but it was taking too long, she knew that all the moms would burn by the time he sorted her uncertainty with his words and messy should-b-forbidden sound. She helped herself helplessly, a kitchen knife to open a few new wounds.

Age wandered through the rooms of her mother's want. She laid down in wicker and knew that she was in search, of plans, and out of time. Age placed two fists under her abdomen and pressed her self in too.

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DIE FRAU MIT 50 FÜSSEN

DIE FRAU MIT 50 FÜSSEN

AFTERWORDS

ON THE COMING OF AGE

The Coming of Age is a romance novel and – at the same time - it is a pedagogical and cultural critical exercise on the genre of romance.

Cara Benedetto gave the students and professors, involved in this project, a damned object, entlisting us in its damning process. *There is no book though it is coming*, she said, and her seminar called *Writing Anxiety A Way* started – here, from the announcement:

Anticipation, as a mode of anxiety or excitement around waiting, points to an event where the anxiety is not only inherent in the building of the event but also the end result. How we deal with an end inevitably leads to how we deal with new beginnings, as well as the present.

A Sisyphus task of producing and deconstructing anticipation begun. In the department: Damn!! There is no book, though it is coming.

There is no performance, though we will make it; there is no event, though it will happen. So, we presented works and performances in the theater: *a final project occuring between us, and the spaces that we made*. Damn!! The unfortunate need for communication, for sex, for food; this awkwardness, this inability, this failure.

And then she left. Months later she sent us *The Coming of Age*. Thank You Cara, for this manuscript that *dismantles ,coming' as a construction of false desire in both the erotic and the consumer zones*. We shall exercise against anticipation as the contemporary imposition of performing everytime and everywhere and the climate it creates for one's own expectations. That is the battlefield described, the act of writing is the proposal within that fight. Thank You Cara for de-placing our own grammar and shuttering our own logic in the process of reading. Every brain cell is part of a sexual space, the head is sex as it is the other's head. The text constructs a space in which characters, animals, skin, temperature and liquids are hanging and swinging in. It enjoys the strong presence of animal watchfulness. It amazes by integrating cheap predictable languages and narratives of porno encounters into a wider space with lots of voices.

Discoteca Flaming Star

for the Frau mit 50 Füßen, September 2014

PROLOGUE FOR IMAGES

HALF-WAY BETWEEN SEDUCTION AND PRODUCTION

Cara Benedetto, Yaron Bekker, Nehle Bertsch, Florian Fischer,
Claudia Gienger, Tim Hendel, Valentin Hennig, Julia Herbrik,
Eugenia Hoffman, Janine Imhoff, Julia Keller, Juliane Molter,
Lisa Mühleisen, Emma Neufeld, Elisabeth Roth,
Julie Zimmermann

A FINAL PROJECT THAT WILL OCCUR BETWEEN US,
AND THE SPACES THAT WE'VE MADE

More than one object, more than one time based work, more than
one audio piece. We will once again ask, demand, and set up a space
in which the audience will join as Participants as Artists as All.
The focus will fall upon the transitions between all works in order
to create a dynamic event.

4 PM TO 12 AM ON SATURDAY, FEBRUARY 8, 2014

The event will occur as follows:

4-7 OBJECTS OPEN

7-9 PERFORMANCE / PROJECTIONS OCCUR

9-12 AUDIO ABOUNDS

HOW MANY DREAMS OF COMMUNICATION WITHOUT COMPROMISE?

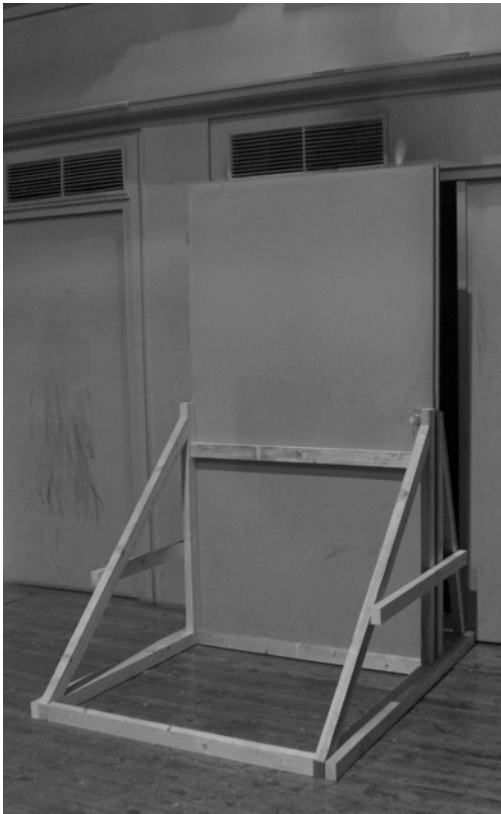
SO MANY













Die Frau Mit 50 Füßen

This book is the second in a series of publications on contemporary art inaugurated by the department of Fine Arts / Intermedia Arts at the Academy of Art and Design in Stuttgart.

The series focuses on artistic practices and discourses of groups and individuals that are central to the department of Intermedia Arts. A proposal for reflecting on performative practices as a way of working with time and space, the handling of objects, and spending time together, as well as with the audience. Placing oneself into a state of uncertainty, into the intermediate spaces between white cube and black box, museum and theater; negotiating artistic material provisionally and indeterminately, between spectacular presence and dispersed remnants; sounding the depths of temporality between presentness and archive, now and after, life and recording.

May these cross-fertilizing proposals and thoughts on questions of performativity and on contemporary art in general be helpful and significant, both within and beyond the Academy.

Intermedia Arts

is a postgraduate program at the Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design and an alternative to the usual required pedagogical course for students in art education. Under the direction of Discoteca Flaming Star since 2011, this area of study can be understood as a laboratory site for interactive and intermedia artmaking which explores fields and relationships between visual arts and performing arts in installations and performances. The name itself points to the difficulties of grasping a kind of work that deals with the live moment as an autonomous artistic praxis, not to mention positively defining the necessary tools and methods, gestures and actions, persons and roles, spaces and temporalities.

The Coming of Age

is the epilogue to the cooperation between the Akademie Schloss Solitude and the Academy of Art and Design in Stuttgart. Benedetto was an artist in residence at Akademie Schloss Solitude and the department of Fine Arts / Intermedia Arts at the Stuttgart Academy of Art and Design in Stuttgart during the winter term 2013/14.

Cara Benedetto

is a New York City based artist. Her interest in art making has come to center on the interrelation between feminism, ethics and pedagogy. The potential that exists in learning and the active role in positioning oneself in order to receive, within a mutually reciprocal relation, is the basis for her practice. Writing oneself into the world, rearranging economies, and the re-examination of woman as image are issues surrounding her work. Books, small-scale installations and intimately staged performances employ various techniques to play with the viewer / artist relationship and the social conditions that produce each.

Benedetto has held solo shows in New York, Los Angeles, and Berlin. Her work has been published with *Badlands Unlimited*, NY, *Qui Parle*, Berkeley, *A tale of three cities*, Berlin, and *Night Papers*, LA.

She is a current Visiting Professor at the School of Art at Carnegie Mellon University in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Discoteca Flaming Star

is an interdisciplinary collaborative art group. Since 1998 Cristina Gómez Barrio and Wolfgang Mayer work as the basis of DFS. In 2011 they took over the Professorship for the department of Fine Arts / Intermedia Arts at Stuttgart State Academy of Art and Design.

For those and you with grace I remain,

Aaron Kunin, Alex Reynolds, Alex Kitnick, Antonia Terhederbrügge,
Aura & John, BenAdam, Cammi Climaco, Christopher E. Vroom, Claudia
Gienger, Corinn Gerber, Dad & Donna, Dana & Ginger, Danna Vajda,
Davida Nemeroff, Discoteca Flaming Star, Douglas & Norbert,
Eboni & Elisha, Elisabeth Roth, Ellery Asher Ireland, Emma Neufeld, Eu-
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Imhoff, Jean-Baptiste Joly, Joey, Julia Herbrik, Julia Keller,
Juliane Molter, Julie Zimmermann, Katarina Burin, Kate Hillseth,
Kelly Taxter, Lisa Mühleisen, Lindsay Foster, Manuela Lomba,
Mira Dancy, Mia Ender, Mom & Jim, Nehle Bertsch, Nicole Russo,
Paul Heyer, Petra von Olschowski, Robert Ochshorn, Ryan Schaefer,
Rosalyn Deutsche, Siegfried Kalnbach, Silke Pflüger, Suzanne Herrera,
Tim Hendel, Thom Donovan, Uli Cluss, Valentin Hennig, Vesna & Alex,
Yaron Bekker, and Zackary Drucker

love to you,

Cara

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ANGER."

AARON KUNIN

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